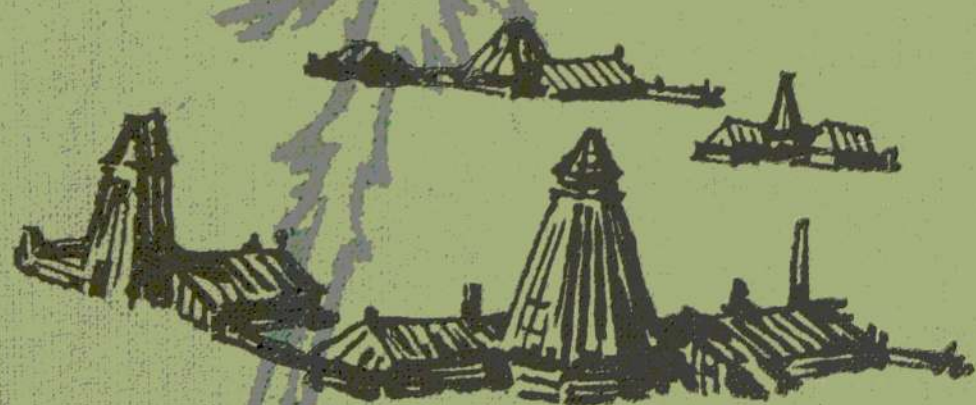


**D. MAMIN**  
**SIBIRYAK**

**THE PRIVALOV**  
**FORTUNE**













Д.Н. МАМИН-СИБИРЯК

# ПРИВАЛОВСКИЕ МИЛЛИОНЫ



ИЗДАТЕЛЬСТВО ЛИТЕРАТУРЫ НА ИНОСТРАННЫХ ЯЗЫКАХ

Москва

D. MAMIN-SIBIRYAK

**THE PRIVALOV  
FORTUNE**



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# **PART** ONE



## I

**M**ATRYONA, the chambermaid, darted into the bedroom, gasping, 'He's come, he's come—last night! He's at the 'Golden Anchor.' "

Khiona Zaplatina, a lady of uncertain age, with a faded face, was standing before the mirror in her morning dishabille. Her hair, the colour of camel wool, hung in strands down her back and shoulders, failing miserably to hide the sinewy gauntness of her neck. By reason of a missing button her soiled night-gown revealed a withered, bony breast. Matryona's communication struck the lady like a bolt of lightning. She dropped the comb with which she had been assiduously trying to disentangle her hair. In the corner, beside a narrow window overlooking the backyard, sat a man of about forty, entirely hidden from view by a newspaper. It was Victor Zaplatin, the surveyor of the Uzel land office. Reasonably plump, ruddy-cheeked, tanned, with a thick blond beard and kind grey eyes, he was as much the opposite in appearance to his worthy half as a ripe apple is to a dried pear. Stretched languidly in his blue upholstered armchair, he was sipping coffee from a glass. Matryona's precipitous entry and whispered information left him unmoved. He went on reading his paper with utter indifference.

"Matryona, dear, let Agrippina Veryovkina know at once," Zaplatina said hastily to her chambermaid. "Wait! Say, 'He's here.' Nothing more. Clear? Well, hurry—hurry, for heaven's sake!"

In emergencies such as this Matryona was indispensable. She would fly like the wind at the drop of the arm, even to the end of the world. Just an ordinary slatternly maid with a run-down doltish countenance and black circles under saucy brown eyes, her shabby calico dresses always too tight for her powerful young frame, she was a gold-mine in Zaplatina's hands, possessed as

she was of the happy knack of doing unquestioningly everything she was bid.

"Oh, dear! Victor, I say! Good heavens!" Zaplatina groaned, bustling aimlessly about the room.

"What's the matter?"

"Didn't you hear? He's come!"

"What of it?"

"Why, you ass! Privalov—the millionaire! Understand? Mil-lionaire! Heavens, where's my corset? Where's my corset?" Khiona chanted.

"Leave me alone."

"Idiot! Dear me! I've said to Agrippina so many times, '*Mon ange*,' I've said, 'there's something behind his coming.' Yes, that's what I've said. What an uproar this'll create at the Bakharevs', at the Lyakhovskys', at the Polovodovs'! Can you imagine? Serves them right, too—the Lyakhovskys and Polovodovs, I mean. Privalov will take them down a peg or two. Putting on airs—and their noses far from clean. The heir'll make them sit up, the precious dears, just wait and see! Ha-ha, Victor, you blockhead, d'you hear? *Privalov's come!*"

"Leave me alone, for heaven's sake!" Victor Zaplatin growled, and, imitating his wife, added, "'He's come, he's come!' What of it? He needed to come. A poor mortal like all of us. If I had a million, I'd..."

"Why doesn't he stay at the Bakharevs'?" Zaplatina mused, investing her bony frame in a corset. "Seems to be up to something. I'll go to the Bakharevs'. Must warn Marya. He's a heaven-sent match for Nadine! The rich have all the luck. With all their money a millionaire son-in-law drops from the clouds right into their lap. Just think: the Lyakhovskys have a daughter; the Vervovkins have a daughter; the Bakharevs have two, and Polovodov has a sister. They'll tear him to pieces!"

"A woman you are and a woman you'll always be," Zaplatin chuckled. He fixed his eyes abstrusely upon the



embroidered hem of his dressing gown. "All you can think of is matchmaking.... Why, the man's from Petersburg. He won't look at the local girls. Marry *him* off! Pfui!"

"Heavens, you're dense," Zaplatina retorted with feigned indifference. She slipped into a redyed apple-green silk dress and tried on a brown-trimmed straw hat. "Men have no idea. To hear you carry on Privalov will associate with the actresses from the 'Magnet.' Like Ivan Veryovkin, like Lepyoshkin and Lomtev? You'd love to join them, wouldn't you? Don't deny it. Men are all alike. But you can't hoodwink me. Oh no, I see right through you—ready to take up with the first wench who comes your way."

She turned abruptly and examined herself in the mirror over her shoulder. The dress, sack-like, bulged at the back and hung limply about her shanks in sickly folds, as if draping a pair of sticks. "Perhaps I'd better put on my new dress, the one the Panafidins gave me for finding their Kapochka a husband?" Zaplatina wondered, but decided: "No, better not. Marya Bakhareva might think I'm playing up to her."

The worthy dame assumed a proud, arrogant expression.

"I say, Khiona," uttered Zaplatin who had been watching his wife's movements. "Don't overdo it, d'you hear? With the jerez, I mean. Your nose is like a cranberry already."

"A cranberry? My nose?" Khiona drew herself up pompously to her full height and, giving her husband a killing look, declaimed with the air of a provincial actress:

"If Agrippina should come in my absence, tell her I'll be sure to visit her today. Clear?"

"Clear enough. The two of you are going to have your hands full now, aren't you?"

In the town of Uzel, adrift amidst the Ural wilderness, the Zaplatins were a peculiar phenomenon entirely in

keeping with the times—a logical product of a great many contemporary causes and effects. True to their day, they were the bearers of its aspirations, virtues and vices. Victor Zaplatin was the son of a watchman, a retired soldier. He had scrimped through a meagre education and at a very green age joined the local law-court, where, at thirty, he duly received the handsome sum of fifteen rubles a month. This sufficed for a respectable wardrobe, and gave him access to the modest homes of the local officialdom. Insignificant in itself, this latter circumstance had a decisive bearing on Zaplatin's future. At an evening social he was swept off his feet by the supreme petulance of a certain governess. True, she had a somewhat tarnished reputation, but this was amply compensated for by a dowry of three thousand rubles. Zaplatin had the good sense to see that her reputation mattered far less than this handsome round sum, which would be a welcome addition to his yearly hundred and eighty rubles.

The match came off and bore gradual fruit in the shape of a ten-ruble rise in salary, a house worth at least fifteen thousand, a horse and carriage, four servants, a respectable household and a fairly substantial deposit in the local savings bank. To cut the story short, the Zaplatins were comfortably installed and spent about three thousand a year. Victor Zaplatin, though he changed the law-court for the land office, still had his annual three hundred. His scanty salary was, of course, known to all. Yet whenever people spoke of his extravagance they usually said, "But Khiona runs a boarding-school. She speaks excellent French." Some put it more simply: "Khiona is indeed a very clever woman." Even the backwoods were waking up to the fact that "clever" people could earn three hundred and live on three thousand. This phenomenon, so wholly in the spirit of the day, surprised no one; it was only right—right just because it existed.

The Zaplatin home had a fairly respectable-looking front door, which led into a bright antechamber. From the antechamber one door issued directly into a pleasant little hall, another communicated with three separate rooms, and a third led to a dark corridor which separated the premises occupied by the Zaplatins from those of the boarding-school. The parlour with its tawdry splendour was, naturally enough, the heart of the entire establishment; it communicated with the Zaplatin half of the house by way of a modest-sized dining-room, and by a door with the three rooms which could serve at will either as separate chambers or as part of the hall. The latter contained a fairly decent grand piano and quite respectable furnishings. All the other chambers had no more than odd pieces of furniture; the wall-paper had seen better days, and the curtains bore spots and stains and greasy imprints of Matryona's soiled fingers. The Zaplatin establishment was in eternal turmoil. People kept coming and going, chiefly ladies who called for an earful of the latest gossip, imparted their share of rumour and made their departure brimming with information, like bees with pollen. Khiona dreamed of her parlour becoming a fashionable salon where young people would consummate their education and learn good manners from living examples, and where people of position would not be loath to congregate—the women to display their beauty and costumes, the visiting actors and actresses to seek patrons, the local talent to pick up advice and encouragement, and the young things on the look-out for likely matches. The Zaplatins lacked funds to accomplish this ambitious plan. But more than that, this being the hardest blow of all to Khiona's tender heart, their salon was ignored by the best Uzel families—the Bakharevs, Lyakhovskys and Polovodovs. Credit is due to Khiona's spirit, however. She did not lose hope. "Who knows," she mused to herself, "the bells may still ring in my street. Times do

change so!" Like a spider spinning its web, waiting greedily for its prey, she kept on hoping with a patience worthy of a better application.

"Khiona? She's nothing more nor less than a triple-decker parasite," Nicolas Veryovkin, the solicitor, said about her, "a water beetle—whatever its Latin name—whose bowels harbour a parasite worm, which, in its turn, harbours a tape-worm. D'you see my point? The parasite feeds off the beetle, and the tape-worm feeds off the parasite, much like our Khiona. She feeds off us, and we feed off anyone we can fleece."

As for her family life, the hours from two in the morning, when Khiona came home from her club activities or a social, until ten, when she rose from her beauty sleep, were devoted to that province. The rest of the day she received guests or paid visits. Victor Zaplatin had no quarrel with this state of affairs, for it allowed him ample freedom to pursue his favourite occupation—politics. All he asked from life was a chance to recline undisturbed in his soft chair, read the latest papers, and sip his fragrant Mocha. His thoughts were perpetually occupied with the higher aspects of European politics: Beaconsfield, Bismarck, Gambetta, Andrassy, Grant. *There* was something to ponder upon. As for the endless stream of guests invading his privacy, he had his own way with them, making his appearance, saying his halloes, smiling to those he knew, and deftly buttonholing a victim, whom he piloted into a quiet corner to discuss the latest European news.

"I must consult my husband," Khiona would say when faced by an exigency. "He gets so annoyed if I do anything without his consent."

But that was mere show, a conventionality intended simply to add to her husband's prestige. There was never really any exchange of opinion between the two, save some slight family friction on the mornings after an in-

judicious cup, or before a turn in the weather. Zaplatin had not the least wish to interfere in his wife's affairs.

Khiona's boarding-school was a mystery. Boarders—distant kin, orphans and retainers all—appeared, and vanished tracelessly after a few months to give place to new distant relations, orphans and retainers. One would think Khiona had dozens of relatives in every corner of the world. What knowledge was imparted at the boarding-school, and who imparted it, were questions even Khiona would have had difficulty in answering. What intercourse there was between the school and the outer world was effected solely through the medium of Matryona.

To conclude the description of the Zaplatin household, we should add that French was its soul, its alpha and omega. French hung in the air at all times—when guests came, when they departed, and when things were said that were better unsaid in Russian. French was used to impress the uninitiated, to cut a figure, to set the fashion. In Khiona's life French was an inexhaustible source of all manner of collocations, and, most important, it gave her the reputation of a high-minded, educated, progressive personality.

## II

The Bakharevs lived at the end of Nagornaya Street in a single-storey house overlooking the thoroughfare with fifteen of its windows. There was something gracious and cheerful in its physiognomy (every house, strange as it may seem, has its own physiognomy). Regular and peaceful was the tide of human affairs passing in the shelter of its wide green roof and its low grey walls. Its small curtained windows with flower-pots ranged along the sills, looked out into the street most amiably, like well-preserved friendly old ladies. Pedestrians hasten-

ing by along the pavements cast envious glances through them at the Bakharev domain where everything breathed placid contentment and happiness. Many of these men and women thought in passing how much they would like, if even for a month, a week, a mere day, to recover their peace of mind in this fine old house, to rest there body and soul from life's vagaries and embroilments.

A massive stone gate opened into a spacious courtyard sprinkled, like a circus arena, with fine yellow sand. The side of the house overlooking the yard had two tidy porches separated by a large verandah, which was overgrown with garlands of wisteria and covered with a festooned sun-shade. Low steps descended from it into a spruce little flower garden enclosed by a green wooden palisade. Solidly built log outhouses stood in the back of the yard, a living wall of acacias and lilac shrubs stretching between them and the house, rising in green tufts from behind a handsome ironwork enclosure supported by elegant pillars. Parallel to the main building sprawled a long wooden structure which housed the kitchen, the baths and the coachmen's quarters.

The Bakharev ménage consisted of two halves, each with its own front entrance. The porch nearer the gate led to the half of the house occupied by the master, Vasily Nazarovich Bakharev, and the farther porch to that of his wife, Marya Stepanovna. One needed to go no farther than the antechamber to be enwrapped in the atmosphere of contentment that reigned in the house ever since it was built. Both halves had rows of bright, cosy chambers with shining floors and new wall-paper. The ceilings were embellished with colourful designs, and the narrow white doors were fresh as paint. Soft rugs ran the length of the house from room to room. There was, indeed, a difference between the half belonging to Vasily Bakharev, and that of his wife, but we shall speak of it later, because it is time to return to Khiona

Zaplatina, whose carriage has drawn clattering up to the second porch. She nodded cheerfully to a young woman who came out on the verandah.

"Ah, *mon ange!*" Khiona brushed the girl's pink cheeks with her dry blue lips. "*Je suis charmée!* Nadine, you are a rose! Your linen dress becomes you so well. You are the image of Faust's Marguerite when she steps into the garden. Do you remember that scene?"

Nadine, the Bakharevs' eldest daughter, was a tall, fetching girl of twenty. We daresay she was pretty, but there was nothing of Marguerite in her for all that. Khiona's comparison made her smile, but her deep-grey eyes, fringed with thick black lashes, looked thoughtfully from below her eyebrows. She pushed back loose strands of her light-blonde, smoothly-brushed hair, which had escaped from under her sun hat, and uttered quietly:

"Do I really resemble Marguerite?"

"Oh, you're a perfect Marguerite," Khiona replied hastily.

"But just the other day you compared me to someone else."

"Ah, yes, but that was a different thing entirely. That was when you wore a *sarafan*. . . . Is your mother home? I come on important business—highly important. In a way, *mon ange*, it concerns you."

"What, another young man?" Nadine asked.

"Nothing wrong in that, is there, *mon ange*? Every Marguerite must have her Faust. That's a law of nature. But this time I didn't have to look for him. He came by himself. Fell right out of the clouds."

"Didn't hurt himself, I hope!"

Khiona waved her hands in remonstrance and vanished in the nearest door. She passed several chambers with the assurance of one who knew her way about the house and issued forth into a dark narrow corridor, which joined the two halves of the house. In the darkness a pair

of small warm palms clapped over Khiona's eyes, and a ringing girlish voice sang out, "Guess who!"

"Ah, my frisky little goat," Khiona whispered, unclasping the plump hands. "No one but you would play pranks in this house. I just saw Nadine. She finds it hard to smile, it seems. No girlish thoughts on *her* mind! Well, how are you, dear Vera, *ma petite chèvre*! Ah, you young people, all you know is pranks and laughter!"

"Would you prefer me to mourn?" Vera asked, kissing Khiona resoundingly. Everything the girl did, she did with gusto, and had the habit of "smacking everyone," as Nadine described her kisses.

"Ah, *ma petite*, everything in due time; there'll be time for tears, perhaps, and time for heartaches too."

"Well, I'll cry when the time comes, but not before," replied Vera. "Not now. Mother's in the chapel. It's her you want to see, isn't it?"

"Yes, I absolutely must," Khiona uttered gravely. She arranged her ruffled ribbons, and added significantly, "It's positively imperative."

"Shan't be a minute," Vera chirped. Turning nimbly on one leg, she skipped down the corridor.

"That girl won't need my help to find a husband." Khiona smiled to herself. "She won't stay a maid for long, like those other duchesses who do nothing but put on airs. They think they're educated young women, but when it's time for wedding-bells, it's I who must find them a suitable match."

Khiona passed into a small corner room with old-fashioned furniture and diverse cupboards displaying pieces of rare silverware and expensive china. Chinese cups, Japanese vases, and splendid Sèvres and Saxon porcelain sparkled attractively behind large glass panes. In one corner icons by ancient masters were arranged neatly in a gilded image-case. Emaciated, withered saintly visages with thin noses and lips and deep furrows upon



their brows and under their eyes stared dismally from ornate gilded frames sprinkled with pearls, emeralds and rubies. An image-lamp before them cast a weak, unflickering light. Clean white curtains were drawn over the narrow windows. Large carafes of home-brewed dewberry and rowan brandy alternated with flower-pots upon the lacquered window-sills. Khiona walked across the soft Persian carpet and dropped into a low sofa behind a redwood table which had legs shaped like lion's paws. There was a peculiar air in this little room—the heady odour of benzoin, wood-oil, incense, and God knows what other pleasant smells. The dark-blue wall-paper with its flower bouquets and golden ornaments imparted a restful, serene semi-darkness. Above the sofa, an old oil-painting in a heavy gilt frame portrayed a young man and girl, both arrayed in costumes worn at the time of the first French revolution, sitting under the thick boughs of a tree and looking tenderly into each other's eyes. To the right of the sofa, heavy brown portières draped a small door which led to Marya Stepanovna's bedroom.

"Good news rides post," a tall, plump woman said cheerfully from the door of the bedchamber; Vera's pink animated face, a funny lock of hair on her forehead, was peeping over the woman's shoulder.

"Ah, my dear!" Khiona rose hurriedly from the sofa with all her gaudy array of ribbons. We might add in parentheses that the ribbons served rather to conceal the sundry stains and tears in her costume than to beautify their wearer. "Yes, indeed, I bring good news."

Marya Bakhareva was of that uncertain age when a woman cannot quite be described as old. She was surprisingly well preserved for her fifty-five years, and one would never have given her that much, considering her fresh rosy complexion and large lively dark eyes. She wore an old-fashioned blue silk sarafan with a plain

back and very small arm-holes. The puffy sleeves of her white cambric blouse peeked prettily from out of the arm-holes, and its collar lay in folds like a rosette about her plump white neck. Golden trimmings ran down the front of the sarafan from top to hem in two parallel rows, and large amethyst buttons beamed between them. Her thick blonde hair was gathered neatly under a fetching wimple which matched the sarafan, its foremost edge adorned with a wide string of pearls. In this costume Marya Bakhareva looked a typical old-time Russian beauty. Gliding forward slowly in her high-heeled red shoes, she kissed her visitor.

"Run down to the pantry, dear," she said to Vera. "Get a jar of preserves, and while you're about it you might tell Dosifeya to bring the samovar."

Vera left the room reluctantly. She was dying to hear what Khiona Zaplatina had to say. Khiona always knew so many stories and scandals; this time she had even said it was "positively imperative" for her to see Mother.

"Mother would!" the girl thought, pouting.

"Why did you send her away?" Khiona asked after Vera left the room.

"The child's too young; she who knows too much soon grows old."

"Well, I bring good tidings," Khiona said solemnly, raising her scrubby eyebrows as high as the brim of her hat. "Pri-va-lov, Sergei Alexandrovich Privalov, has arrived—yesterday. You haven't heard? Well, he's here."

Marya's hands dropped on to her lap. The news startled her. She mumbled in confusion:

"Oh dear! Where is he?"

"At the 'Golden Anchor.' Took a ruble room," Khiona reported. "Has a man with him, and three suit-cases. Went right to bed."

"Why did he pick a tavern?"

"It's not a tavern," Khiona corrected her, "it's a rooming house."

"That's all one to me, dear—tavern or rooming house. I've never seen the inside of one. Why didn't he go to his own house, or come to us? We'd be glad to have him."

"Don't take it to heart," Khiona protested. "A gentleman never imposes upon people. The house is his, of course, but it's occupied. He could have come to you, but you have marriageable daughters. It wouldn't be right. A young man can't afford to be tactless. When I heard he had come, I crossed myself. 'There,' I thought, 'is a match for Nadine.' I give you my word. And I cried—for no reason at all. The tears just poured and poured. I lost no time in coming to tell you."

"For all you know, my dear, Privalov may be married," retorted Marya Bakhareva.

"Oh, I should never have come to worry you then. Matryona's been at the 'Golden Anchor' five times. She's ferreted everything down to the minutest detail from Privalov's man through the bar-keeper. Grant God, everything will go right! If he isn't a suitable match, I don't know who is. He's young, handsome, rich. He's a millionaire. But I don't have to tell *you*."

"As for his being a millionaire," Bakhareva uttered gruffly, pursing her lips, "he has still to make the millions."

"Oh, for pity's sake, my dear! Didn't his mother leave him five hundred thousand?" Khiona exclaimed.

"Subtract three hundred thousand."

"Well, what of it? That still makes two hundred thousand—a tidy sum."

"But he's probably spent it in Petersburg," Bakhareva observed.

"Not a bit of it. Nicolas Veryovkin knew him at the University. He says—these are his very words—that Pri-

valov was a marvel of temperance. Besides, he'll get his father's three millions, won't he?"

"You never can tell, my dear Khiona. They won't come easily for one thing, even if there's anything left of them. The Shatrov Mills are heavily in debt, you know."

"Good heavens!" Khiona appealed. "Why must you contradict? Everybody knows that Privalov will get three millions. Yes! Three, three, three!"

Vera was at the door with a plateful of cherry preserves, and her little pink ear caught the last phrase. Privalov's name made her start. Was it the same Sergei Privalov who had lived with them and had gone to school with their Konstantin? One day, she had bitten his ear when they were playing jacks. For some reason Vera's heart leaped in alarm, and the thought flashed like lightning through her mind: "A husband! A husband for Nadinel!"

"What's come over you?" Marya Bakhareva asked as her daughter, flushed crimson, re-entered the room.

"I—I ran up the stairs," Vera gasped, her face turning an even deeper red.

"Ah, young thing!" Khiona sang out sweetly, rolling her eyes. "Innocent, timid and so absurd. Ah, sweet sixteen!"

Vera was indeed gorgeous in her embarrassment. Her brown eyes were wide open and a sheepish smile roved over her dimpled face. Her dark hair was as smoothly combed as her sister's, save the lock at the parting, which perpetually defied the brush. A heavy plait hung down her back. But the pale-yellow dress somewhat impaired her looks, suggestive as it was of a bread-and-butter miss. The dress was not of her own choosing. Gay colours were a passion with her. She loved pink, lilac, sky blue. "Little rainbow," her brother Victor always said of her when she put on a dress she liked. Just sixteen, she could not accustom herself to wearing long dresses,

which simply maddened her. Her figure was as yet unformed and she remained the same little "dumpling" whom her father so loved to tease.

The scene was cut short by Dosifeya, who brought in a middle-sized, boiling tombac samovar, which wheezed irascibly, as one deeply insulted. Dosifeya was as tall and handsome as her sister Marya, though her well-made face was of a coarser stamp, as those of all deaf-and-dumb people. A gusseted indigo sarafan covered her powerful form and she wore a sectarian maiden's wimple. A long white apron was made fast under her very armpits. Marya Bakhareva addressed her in sign language and Dosifeya looked round the room with a stunned expression. Then she rushed out abruptly and a minute later appeared on the verandah, where Nadine sat reading a book. Dosifeya folded her mighty arms round the girl, raining kisses upon her face, neck and hands.

"What's ailing you?" Nadine demanded in surprise when the paroxysm subsided.

"Mmm—aah," Dosifeya grunted, gesticulating.

"Oh, that Khiona," Nadine muttered, "she'll drive anyone insane."

The girl explained to Dosifeya with signs and gestures that the whole thing was no more than a hoax, that there would never be a young man where she was concerned. But Dosifeya shook her head and indicated that Marya Bakhareva herself had told her about it.

### III

"He's come!" Khiona ejaculated when a cab drew up beside the porch and a tall gentleman in a soft grey hat descended from it.

"Good heavens! So soon!" Marya Stepanovna murmured tremulously. "Vera, run and tell Father—tell him—Oh, what am I saying?"

"Call Nadine," Khiona interposed.

"Yes, do—do indeed," Bakhareva agreed. "Oh, dear! We have nothing special for dinner today. You said he came last night. I never thought he would visit us before tomorrow. I don't think Nadine even has a new dress. It's still at the dressmaker's."

Vera found Nadine in the dark corridor as the latter was going to her room, clutching an open book in her hand.

"Go to Mother's. Hurry, for goodness' sake," Vera whispered, rising on her toes.

"What's come over you, Vera?" Nadine inquired.

"Hurry, hurry!"

Nadine sensed that she would learn nothing from her sister and hastened down the corridor. Vera stared after her for a moment, then ran and embraced her from behind, planting a kiss on her neck.

"Everybody's gone mad today," Nadine muttered vexedly, freeing herself from Vera's embrace. "What is this all about? A minute ago Dosifeya nearly choked me, and now it's you."

"Nadine," Vera breathed, clasping her hand to her heaving breast, "he's come—Privalov, I mean!"

Nadine went to her mother's room, while Vera tiptoed towards the hall and inspected Privalov through the key-hole. He was speaking to old Luka.

"Don't you recognize me?" Privalov asked the wizened old man, who was blinking his little eyes.

"No—no," Luka stammered, slowly moving his parched lips.

"Remember Sergei Privalov?"

"Good heavens!" Luka whimpered shakily, rushing to help the visitor with his paletot and kissing the sleeve of his frock-coat. "I'm losing my mind in my old age. Holy Saints!"

"How's your master?"

"Fine, fine—I mean—oh, I'm all flustered. I'll—announce you at once. Who would have thought—" Luka stuttered.

"And how've you been, old man?" Privalov asked as they were walking across the drawing-room.

"No complaints. Comfy as an old tom-cat. It's only my damned legs. There are times they feel like they belonged to someone else. My left jerks skywards, as if I were for ever climbing stairs."

With the volubility of an old man Luka managed to endow Privalov with a good many facts in the brief space of two or three minutes. The master, it developed, also had trouble with his legs, he and Konstantin were at odds, and he, Luka, was stung to the quick, for they had hired "butler Igorka," who did little more than sleep.

"That's him over there," Luka muttered, squinting his eyes at a handsome young lackey with an English haircut. "See what he's done to his hair? But I'll announce you myself. Ah, you're a sight for sore eyes. I won't be a minute."

Luka went toward the oak door, his left leg stepping unnaturally high. Vera was perfectly content with what she had seen. Privalov, as far as she was concerned, qualified for the part of the mythical creature she pictured as Nadine's prospective husband. Was not her sister an extraordinary girl, beautiful and clever? It was only natural that her husband should be extraordinary too. For one, Privalov was a millionaire (Vera was a practical-minded young thing, conscious of that word's magic qualities); furthermore, so much had been spoken of him, and now he was here, had dropped right out of the blue. She approved of his height, his voice, even his gingerish beard. Yet he had irregular features and prominent cheekbones, small brown eyes and a large mouth, and was scarcely handsome. His eyes were kind, it is true, but that is hardly enough to qualify someone as handsome. Vera hurried back to her mother's.

"The silly girl won't even change her dress," Marya Bakhareva snapped impatiently, pointing at Nadine.

"Well, what is he like? Handsome? Dark? Blond? His eyes—how are they?" Khiona asked, words pouring from her mouth like dry peas from a torn sack.

"He's tall. Wears a beard. He was speaking to Luka," Vera uttered.

"And the eyes, what eyes has he?" Khiona pressed.

"Black, I think. No, grey . . . black," Vera stammered.

"What was he saying to Luka?" her mother asked.

Vera rendered a confused and repetitious account of what she had seen. Nadine watched her with an air of mute pity, at a loss what to do with herself.

Privalov's sudden arrival caused a commotion in the Bakharev household. Marya Bakhareva was trying on her third sarafan, assisted by Dasha, her chambermaid, and Khiona Zaplatina. Vera was in her petticoats, wondering what dress she should wear, until she finally picked the pink barege. It was only natural that clasps, hooks and buttons should become undone, or break; and though needle and thread were the simplest remedy, they had to be obtained from Dosifeya who was then running riot with her pots and pans in the kitchen and fought shy of all appeals for help. Even old Luka was assiduously polishing a bronze door-knob.

"Grant God, they'll like each other," the loyal old servant mused aloud, spitting on the cloth. "Good thing if they do. Couldn't be better. He's grown up a fine gentleman. Chip off the old block. His old man could floor a chap with a single blow."

"Don't leave us in the lurch, dear Khiona," Bakhareva pleaded without rhyme or reason.

"Never! Didn't I come specially to warn you?" that worthy lady assured her with a good share of hauteur, whilst her bony hands were pulling vainly at the laces of Vera's corset. "It's simply dreadful, dear child. Waist



comes first in a woman. Men are apt to look at your waistline before they look at your face."

"But what can I do about it?" the poor girl asked tearfully.

"It's too late to do anything just now.... You ought to eat less. At school we drank vinegar and ate lime to keep down our waistline."

Only Victor, Bakharev's younger son, took no part in the frenzied preparations. He had come home at six in the morning, "primed to the muzzle," and had thrown himself in his clothes on the oil-cloth sofa of a secluded room, whose windows overlooked the garden. He lay on it now in his unbuttoned tobacco-brown cutaway, his badly rumpled trousers, and in one boot. The other boot lay on the floor beside a gold pocket-watch. Victor's pale face with its thick black eyebrows and small pointed goatee was hardly handsome, but had a touch of originality. His dilated nostrils and the bold cut of his sensuous lips lent his face the whimsical expression of a spoilt child. Igorka, the butler, was trying to rouse the young man, but every time Victor drove him away, thrashing his arms and legs with dangerous violence.

"You're to get up," Igorka announced stolidly from a safe distance at the door, ready to duck in an emergency. "Visitors—Mr. Privalov."

"Hang Privalov. Hang you. I want no Privalov. I'm Privalov!" young Bakharev shouted, aiming his boot at Igorka. "You've had too much to drink. You're fried, you canaille. His wife pushed him out of a window. Privalov's dead. What are you trying to tell me, you blithering idiot!"

"Just as you say," Igorka declared in an injured tone, standing his ground.

"Well, I say get out!" Victor bellowed in exasperation.

"Shall I fetch some soda water, or the smelling salts? You'll feel better," the butler suggested timorously.

"How dare you!" Victor roared.

"It's—it's all the same to me." Igorka backed haughtily out of the door. "Just wanted to be helpful. You've hit me twice. Here, look at my jaw."

"Get out, you and your jaw," Victor moaned. "Get out while the getting's still good!"

Igorka vanished. Young Bakharev forced open his eyes, but instantly shut them again. His head was splitting after the night's carousal.

"Those Irkutsk merchants," he thought. "They certainly can hold their liquor. And Ivan Veryovkin, too, the old buzzard!"

#### IV

Old Bakharev was reclining in an old-fashioned armchair beside his writing-desk when Privalov entered the study. He tried to rise, but sank back helplessly and exclaimed:

"How good to see you! It's so sudden! Let me take a look at you."

He held Privalov's head between his hands and kissed him affectionately.

"What a fine-looking chap!" he said. "A chip off the old block. When did you arrive?"

"Last night."

"Yes, hm—last night," the old man muttered, much as though he was groping for something in his memory.

"Last night—hm."

"How's your wife?" Privalov inquired.

"My wife? Fine, fine. Praying most of the time. Aye, but you're a fine-looking chap!"

"To begin with," Privalov said, lowering himself into an armchair facing the old man, "I want to thank you."

"Did you say 'thank'?" Bakharev interrupted.

"Yes. You've done so much for me."

"Bah, don't give it another thought, young man. We

mustn't keep score. It is I who thank you—for coming. It was about time you came, too. Well, how do things stand with you?"

"Same as before," Privalov replied.

"Hm-m—and I had hoped—but let's leave that for the time being. You've changed. Old Alexander Ilyich, your father, did not ... hm. Don't think ill of him. You're young. It's no concern of yours," old Bakharev said.

"I realize that," Privalov mumbled.

"No. You mustn't think ill of him. Leave the dead in peace."

Old Bakharev shifted his thickset, broad-shouldered frame. His big head with remnants of grey hair and a silvery tousled beard was magnificent in its unique way, and his small grey piercing eyes, for ever searching and stern, were now brimming with love and emotion. But the most extraordinary thing about his severe visage with its knitted eyebrows and compressed lips was the smile. It seemed to light up his face. Only children can smile like that, and austere vigorous old men.

Bakharev's study faced the street with two of its windows, the other three overlooking the courtyard. The wallpaper was a reserved brown, and there were blue damask curtains on the windows. The room was in perpetual semi-darkness. A Persian carpet lay on the floor, and a low Turkish settee stood against the wall facing the desk. There was an iron safe in one corner of the room, and a shelf in another. On the writing-desk ledgers were arranged in tidy stacks beside an abacus with white counters. Letterheads inscribed "Vasily Bakharev Mining Office" lay beside a jasper desk-set under a platinum nugget weighing several pounds, which served as a paper-weight. A faded photograph of Marya Bakhareva and their four children was displayed prominently in a large inlaid golden frame, and an oil-painting, lavishly framed in carved blackwood, hung on the wall above the settee.

It was a fine view of a Siberian mine with a motley group of miners raising a gold-bearing shelf in the foreground, a large gold-washer on their right; which looked like a confusing tangle of planks, troughs and wheels to the uninitiated, and in the background, on a low mound, a mining office with outhouses and miners' living quarters. High mountains densely overgrown with virginal Siberian timber receded to the horizon. The painting was of the Varvarinsk gold-field found by Vasily Bakharev and Alexander Privalov in the heart of the Sayan Range on the bank of a nameless mountain stream, which has since won fame in the annals of Siberian gold prospecting. It was named after Sergei Privalov's mother, Varvara Privalova.

Sergei Privalov was surprised to find that nothing had changed in the study during the fifteen years of his absence. It was much as though he had left the room only the day before. Everything in it was just as unpretentious and plain, and had the same air of efficiency. It seemed uncommonly wholesome to him—the study itself, the old man in it, even the air touched with the fragrance of an expensive cigar.

This was just the sort of setting Privalov had always pictured to himself for old Bakharev's bold business ventures, which ran into the hundreds of thousands.

"We should let Marya know you're here," it occurred to Bakharev suddenly. "She'll be glad to see you. Come, let's go!"

The old man tried to rise from his easy-chair, but sank back again with a suppressed groan, clutching at his bad leg.

"Let me help you," Privalov suggested.

"No, no. You couldn't." The old man smiled ruefully and rang for help. "Luka—he's the man for it. Gone are the days, dear boy. It's the leg today, the arm tomorrow, and soon there'll be nothing—just dust. But the times

we live in! Look at all the golden opportunities! Every hour counts, and me having to waste so much time on doctors. I've lost my sleep over it. When I think of the mines having to get along without me, my heart bleeds. I'd just as soon grow wings and fly there. There's no one to replace me. One of my sons thinks he knows more than his father; as for the other—but you'll see for yourself. Couldn't very well send my daughters to the mines, could I?"

With Luka's help Bakharev rose from his seat and, dragging his bad leg, headed for the door.

"We've lived to see a happy day, you and I," Bakharev uttered, leaning heavily on the shoulder of his loyal servitor. "See what a fine figure he cuts?"

"Indeed! I didn't even recognize him at first. He's altogether changed. When he and Konstantin..."

"What, again?" Bakharev interrupted Luka severely. "Have you forgotten?"

"It won't happen again—ever," Luka assured him hastily. "Slip of the tongue."

"How long d'you expect to stay with us in Uzel?" Bakharev inquired, stopping in the door. "Here we are talking, and I didn't even ask you."

"I think of staying for good," Privalov replied.

"Thank God for that," Luka sang out heartily, crossing himself.

## V

Privalov followed old Vasily Bakharev through several middle-sized, fashionably furnished rooms. Expensive upholstery, carpets, bronze figurines, and silk hangings on doors and windows—all evidenced a luxury that involuntarily leaped to the eye after the modest appointments of Bakharev's own study. A brand-new Bekker grand piano attracted Privalov's attention in the small

blue drawing-room, and he cast a curious glance at the sheets of music on the music-stand.

"Marya and I each have apartments of our own," Bakharev said with a chuckle, lingering in the doorway to the dining-room to catch his breath. "Keeping in step with the times. She never sets foot in my half. Whenever anything crops up we meet in the dining-room."

The dining-room adjoined Marya Bakhareva's apartments and Privalov instantly felt at home in it. Everything to the minutest detail was familiar to him, hallowed by sweet boyhood memories. The faded expensive carpets underfoot, the old-fashioned carved redwood furniture, the bronze chandeliers, malachite vases and the marble tables in the corners, the silver grandfather clock, the bad paintings in their expensive frames, the flowers in the windows and the image-lamps under the ancient icons—all this took him back to the time when he had called this his home. Even the air was still the same, touched with the warmth and fragrance of solid living.

"Ah, there's my Marya Stepanovna," Vasily Bakharev said as they entered a purple living-room.

Marya Bakhareva's tall figure in her old-fashioned pale-blue sarafan appeared as imposing to Privalov as ever. He bent over her hand to kiss it, and she embraced him, pressed her plump right cheek, and then the left, sedately to his as was the old custom, and then kissed him with dry, impassive lips.

"Look at him, Marya," Vasily Bakharev mumbled, dropping with Luka's assistance into a nearby armchair. "Doesn't he cut a fine figure?"

"He's so much like his mother," Marya observed, surveying Privalov from head to foot.

"No fear," the old man objected, "the moment I saw him I knew he was the spitting image of Alexander Privalov. The spitting image."

"No," his wife remonstrated, "he's like his mother!"

The two argued for a bit, each sticking fast to his own opinion.

"You've acquired foreign ways while you were away, haven't you?" Marya Bakhareva turned to the guest. "D'you still cross yourself the way we do, or have you forgotten?"

"No, one doesn't forget the old ways," Privalov replied evasively.

"So many have died." Marya Bakhareva sighed wistfully, cupping her cheek in her hand. "Razmakhnina, the spinster, is the only one left, and old Pavla Kolpakova. Do you remember them?"

"Yes, I do," Privalov said.

"Aye, the good people go—and beat the path for us." Bakharev sighed. "It seems only yesterday you were a mere schoolboy."

A profound silence set in. They felt somewhat awkward, like all people reunited after a long parting. Khiona, lurking all this time in the dark corridor, turned the opportunity to good account. She virtually pushed Nadine into the drawing-room, blessing the girl under her breath.

"My elder daughter Nadine," Vasily Bakharev announced with the air of a proud father.

Privalov bowed, fixing his eyes on Nadine with a start, searching his memory for an earlier image of her. Her placid girlish countenance and large dark-grey eyes seemed so intimately familiar and yet so utterly new.

"Nadine was five when you and Konstantin left for Petersburg," Marya Bakhareva remarked, drawing the girl to her side.

"Dinner is served," Igorka announced, standing smartly erect in the doorway.

"We stick to our old customs. Dinner is at twelve," Marya Bakhareva observed. "People of fashion, I understand, dine at eight, don't they?"

"Particularly those who rise at twelve," Privalov returned.

"What about you?"

"That depends," Privalov replied. "Now that I'm settling in Uzel I'll try dining at twelve."

"That's fine!" Marya Bakhareva was highly pleased with his reply. "Don't change your old ways," she continued didactically. "Your forefathers were pillars of piety. They shunned all novelties, and lived no worse than other people for all that. Take old Pavel Gulyayev, your grandfather. He used to say he'd rather lose his last shirt than sit at the same table with people who shaved and smoked. Yet he built a fine house for you, didn't he? It's fifty years old and good for another two hundred. His kind is extinct nowadays. Only the small fry are left."

Privalov was not listening to her. He wanted to look back at Nadine, walking across the room at her father's side. It was not her beauty which attracted him. It was something else—some abstract, unusual quality that made her different from other people.

"My younger son and daughter," Vasily Bakharev introduced Vera and Victor, who had been waiting for the rest of the family in the dining-room.

"And this is Khiona Zaplatina, a friend," Marya Bakhareva said as Zaplatina importantly returned Privalov's bow.

"Pleased to know you," Privalov said dreamily, shaking Victor's hand.

"So am I," Victor replied. He examined Privalov familiarly. His eyes were bloodshot, and his cutaway was awry.

Vera, who was in her pink dress, flushed becomingly. She had the feeling that everybody's eyes were fixed on her, and was terribly confused, her blush turning an even deeper red. "A suitor," it crossed her mind, and she



lowered her eyes in sweetly painful agitation. Privalov cast a curious glance at the blushing girl and experienced a sense of pleasure, the pleasure of a man back from a distant voyage. He distinctly recalled the two little girls who, back in his boyhood, used to break the austere silence of the Bakharev home with their endless games and boisterous laughter. One of them was nicknamed "dumpling." Glancing at Vera, Privalov suppressed an involuntary smile. In spite of her sixteen years there could be no mistake. It was she, she who was still so much of the "dumpling." The fleeting recollection carried Privalov back to the far-away happy time when he thought himself a member of the Bakharev family. This was the very dining-room where they had had those very special dinners that he had regarded as a veritable ritual. As a boy he had been not a little cowed by Marya Bakhareva, who was always inclined to be strict and was particularly forbidding at table. Indeed, they had all been afraid to utter a word in her presence, and it was only when Vasily Bakharev happened to be at home that the tension eased visibly.

"This is the best we could do at such short notice," the hostess said, handing Privalov a plate of *shchi*; she was deeply convinced that in the whole world Dosifeya alone could cook such *shchi*, and was proud of it.

The porcelain dishes adorned with blue birds and blue trees were the same, and so were the massive monogrammed silver spoons and forks. Dosifeya's cabbage soup was the same, too, with the same appetizing aroma all its own. Privalov was delighted, as though in each familiar thing he regained an intimate friend. The conversation was as staid and earnest as ever, and Marya Bakhareva at the end of the table looked a real queen. Even Khiona Zaplatina was awed by the good fortune of sitting at the same table with a millionaire; true, she tried several times to monopolize the conversation, but

lapsed discreetly into silence again because Marya Bakhareva did not seem to approve of it. She made up for it, however, by staging a regular dumb show of winks, ogles and eloquent leers. On several occasions her eyes travelled meaningfully from Privalov to Nadine and, noting that her ocular manoeuvres had come to her hostess's notice, she sighed profoundly and lowered her eyes in sham modesty.

"People have changed," Marya Bakhareva attested. "I simply can't get on with them any more."

"They're absolutely unbearable," Khiona chimed in, much like the second fiddle in an orchestra.

"It only seems that way, Mother," Nadine contradicted. "There were just as many evil people in the past, and there still are many decent people in our day."

"Quite so," Victor Bakharev affirmed. "I suppose when we grow old we'll also say the only good people lived in our time. Old people always say it."

"You and your David Lyakhovsky will never live to grow old," his father remarked caustically.

"Ah, to be young," Khiona Zaplatina mumbled, screwing up her eyes. "What wouldn't we give to be sixteen again!"

Looking at Khiona's withered face, however, one would scarcely allow that she herself ever had been sixteen, even in the very remote past.

"Are you going to join one of our clubs?" Zaplatina asked Privalov with the air of a *grande dame*.

"Haven't given it any thought yet," Privalov replied. "Besides, I don't think I'll have the time."

"Yes, of course. How silly of me. You'll be so busy. Yet young people must have their diversions, mustn't they?" Khiona enunciated, turning to Marya Bakhareva. "Don't join the Nobles Society whatever you do. It's dull. Nothing but empty gossip. I strongly recommend our

Social Club. You'll get to know all the best-looking girls. Outside Nadine. In spite of her talents, dear Nadine...."

"When did you discover talents in me?" Nadine interrupted mockingly.

"Oh, I saw them all along, dear. It is out of sheer modesty that you don't join our amateur concerts."

When Nadine smiled, the left side of her brow puckered slightly, like her father's. Privalov noticed it, and also the way she shrugged her left shoulder almost imperceptibly—another trait she had in common with the old man. On the whole, it was quite evident that Nadine was far closer to her father than to her mother. All the distinctive Bakharev features which old Luka chose to classify as "lineage" were mirrored in her to the last.

In the end the dinner grew livelier. Much as she tried to control herself, Khiona disgorged her store of fresh gossip. Privalov had the pleasure of learning that Polovodov—not that he wasn't a clever man, dear no—was a terrible snob all the same, and richly deserved to be taught a lesson. She, Khiona Zaplatina, could have given him one the other day, but had pity on him, for it would have involved his sister Anna, and Anna, who was a girl well past her prime and thought herself progressive, etc., etc.

"But how silly of me," Khiona concluded abruptly. "Aren't Polovodov and Lyakhovsky the trustees of your estates? Surely you know them better than I."

"I haven't had any direct dealings with them as yet," Privalov remarked.

"Yes, of course. And what of Nicolas Veryovkin? You went to college with him, didn't you?" Khiona inquired, and added after Privalov's affirmative reply, "He's unusually clever, isn't he? Local merchants think the world of him. He's so terribly witty. The other day he said in reply to the prosecutor's charge, 'Your Honour, gentlemen of the jury, I can only say of the prosecutor's charge

that it's much like a man taking a spoonful of soup and carrying it past his mouth to his ear.' It caused a sensation!"

"Wit indeed! But at what price to his clients?" Bakharev interposed testily.

"Nicolas charges very high fees, but that's all in the spirit of the times. Isn't it?" This last Khiona addressed to Marya Bakhareva.

But the latter made no reply, occupied as she was with Vera and Victor, who were having their own quiet laugh at Khiona's expense. Blushing crimson, Vera bent low over her plate, doing her best to smother a peal of laughter such as the Bakharev house had never heard before. And she would doubtlessly have failed if at this most critical moment the diners had not risen from the table, which opportunity she seized to slip out unnoticed from the dining-room.

## VI

After dinner Luka and Privalov helped Vasily Bakharev back to his study, where, like most old men, he was wont to take an afternoon nap. Privalov made for the door as soon as he had assisted Bakharev to the sofa, but the old man stopped him.

"Don't go," he said, motioning the young man to an armchair by his side. "Were you here when...when Kholostov died?"

The name seemed to stick in the old man's throat.

"No, I was in Petersburg," Privalov replied, wondering what was behind the question.

"How did you learn the Ministry transferred Kholostov's debt to your mills?" Bakharev demanded.

"On receiving word of his death I visited the Ministry. My friends informed me of the verdict passed as Kholostov was on his death-bed, and told me the mills had been made responsible for his debts."

"The news nearly killed me," Bakharev murmured sadly. "It's a shame. As your guardian and trustee Kholostov ran up a million-ruble debt. To do that he resorted to shady dealings. Then he was tried, convicted, deprived of civil rights and exiled to Siberia. In spite of that the Privalov heirs were made responsible for his debts after his death. I can put up with the fact that the Kholostov case dragged on for ten years and that the verdict was announced when Kholostov could be exiled only to the other world. I can put up with that, because in his day Kholostov had a good deal of power and his old chums stood by him. But it's beyond me how a private debt, a debt incurred through sheer swindling, could be transferred to someone else. And what about the seven hundred thousand Engineer Masman misappropriated under government trust? Are the mills accountable for those too?"

"Yes, because Masman took them from the government to expand the mills," Privalov replied.

"Very well. But has Masman shown what he did with the money?" Bakharev pressed.

"No, he hasn't."

"Didn't I write that you do something about it—at least bring Masman to justice?" Bakharev continued.

"It's almost ten years since the mills were in government trust. Much as I tried, I couldn't even learn whether Masman turned in a report at all. I approached the Control Committee about it, the Department of Mines and the Noblemen's Court of Wards. They all said the same thing: 'We don't know. Inquire elsewhere.'"

"Where's Masman himself? In Petersburg?" Bakharev wanted to know.

"Yes. He spends the winters in Petersburg, and the summers on his Crimean estate."

"The estate he bought with your money? Ha, ha. Have you seen him at least?"

"I've tried to see him, but never succeeded," Privalov sighed.

"He wasn't 'receiving,' I suppose? The scoundrel."

Vasily Bakharev shifted heavily and bit his lip.

"Do you have any idea how much the two debts make with the interest?"

"Close on four millions," Privalov stated.

"The day your father died the mills had no debt. What's more, there were some papers and money in the safe, and there were the mines. Then your stepmother married Kholostov, and he squandered the money in some three years, mortgaged the mines, piled up a million-ruble debt, and brought the mills to utter ruin. I had hoped that in government trust the mills would at least operate without a loss, if not at a profit, but this Masman chap made a new million-ruble debt within the year. When the mills at last passed under our guardianship I expected to put things straight. Konstantin has been slaving for five years, and produces an annual dividend of three hundred thousand rubles. But that doesn't go far. The mills must be expanded to pay the four-million-ruble debt; besides, part of it goes to pay the interest, and the rest goes to the heirs. Your stepmother has received her one-fourteenth share, and there are three of you."

"I've spent all my share on the litigation," Privalov said.

"Don't I know it? Well, did you see that—that—your stepmother, I mean?" Bakharev asked.

"No, I didn't actually see her, but I heard a great deal about her."

"Is she still in Moscow?" the old man inquired.

"Yes. And my second brother is suffering from a mental disorder, and Tit, the youngest, is missing," Privalov volunteered.

"I've heard all about that. There's foul play behind it all, I daresay," Bakharev rapped out.

"I wouldn't go so far as to say that."

"Well, take your present trustees. Lyakhovsky has long been dipping his hand into your purse, my boy, but it's very difficult to catch him at it. As for Polovodov, he's still taking his bearings, but he's ready to pounce. When I was trustee myself, I did my best to clear things up; then Lyakhovsky and I quarrelled, and I gave up the trusteeship. To my great surprise Polovodov was appointed in my place. Had I only known. All I wanted was to put the fear of God into Lyakhovsky. But he called my bluff, and I bungled the whole job," Bakharev confessed ruefully.

"You have no cause to blame yourself," Privalov put in.

"When you'll have lived as long as I, you'll know better. No, my boy, life is no picnic. Injustice, deceit and trickery prey on you everywhere you go. You've been robbed! When you succeeded to the Shatrov Mills they were worth well over six millions. Should they come under the hammer today they won't even raise four. More than a million acres of land goes with them. Good gracious! I never thought I'd live to see the Shatrov Mills put up for sale. A good half of them were built on Gulyayev money. Aye, Pavel Gulyayev sealed his daughter's doom on account of them. . . . But enough of that. Go see the women. I'll have my nap."

The old man was deeply agitated, more than he cared to show, and sent Privalov away to hide his feelings from him. Sleep was out of the question, and he lay open-eyed on his sofa. Privalov's arrival had pleased him no end, yet it had also stirred up the rancour long dormant in his heart.

## VII

Khiona Zaplatina withdrew hastily when she heard Privalov coming down the corridor. She kissed Vera, and declared with emphasis while shaking Marya Bakhareva's hand:

"I don't want to intrude. It's practically a family reunion, isn't it?"

Privalov was not alone. Victor Bakharev, uncertain as yet of how to comport himself, strode along at his side. Marya Bakhareva took her guest to her living-room, where Dosifeya served several kinds of preserves in old-fashioned glass platters and a chunk of honey in combs in a quaint Chinese bowl.

"That's Dosifeya, isn't it?" Privalov asked as the woman lingered in the doorway to take another look at him.

"Yes. Do you still remember her?" Bakhareva said.

"Why, Konstantin and myself were everlastingly at war with her," Privalov exclaimed, chuckling.

Dosifeya sensed that they were talking about her and indicated with signs and gestures that Konstantin was away, that the old man was at odds with him and that she remembered that little Privalov used to like honey in combs.

"I still like it," Privalov replied to her vehement gesticulations. "You don't know how touched I am that you haven't forgotten."

Dosifeya grunted happily and made her exit. Bakhareva pressed her guest to eat of the confectioneries. Hospitality was a sacred duty with her and Privalov sampled everything she offered for fear of offending his hostess. He listened with interest to her sad story about the Poluyanovs, Kolpakovs and Razmakhnins. Most all of them had either died or lost their fortunes; entirely new people had come to the fore; altogether new customs had evolved. In passing, Marya Bakhareva even complained



of her own husband, who had taken up with men who shaved and smoked; what was more, he had given his daughter a modern education and had changed the furniture in his half of the house. Her complaints were so delightfully absurd that Privalov had to concentrate on the little pink and blue flowers of her sarafan to avoid the embarrassment of smiling. The sarafan was of the oldest, made of heavy silk which bulged stiffly and had the appearance of leather; years ago it had probably been a turquoise blue, but was now a fashionable pearl grey.

"Your sarafan—they don't have anything like it now," Privalov remarked.

A flush of pleasure suffused his hostess's face, for she held everything that smacked of olden times in something akin to veneration, and was particularly fond of her collection of old-fashioned sarafans, to which she had succeeded after the death of Pavel Gulyayev's wife, "from her mother's branch of the family." She had the histories of the various sarafans at her finger-tips. They served her as a kind of unwritten chronicle, a biography of people dear to her heart and long since dead.

"It's your grandmother's sarafan," she revealed proudly. "Old Pavel Gulyayev brought the fabric from Moscow." And she added with a sigh, "Can't get anything like it now. Today women wear a dress just once or twice and ask for a new one. The fabrics they make today are different, and so are the people."

Victor, bored to distraction by her invariable allusions to the good old days, interrupted her:

"The people today, Mother, are very real people."

"Stuff and nonsense!" his mother rejoined. "Show them to me."

"Do you mean to say Privalov and myself are good-for-nothings?" Victor teased.

"Hold your tongue! What I say is absolutely right," she retorted.

Vera had long ached to join the company, but could not summon up the courage to enter the living-room alone. At last her chance came: she slipped in in Nadine's wake and stationed herself behind her mother. Childhood recollections thronged the room with the arrival of the two girls—recollections that were meaningless, perhaps even absurd, to an outsider, but dear to those concerned. A good many aspects of his boyhood world had slipped Privalov's memory, and he relished the anecdotes recounted by Nadine. "Remember?" and "What about the time when Victor..."—these phrases on Nadine's lips were a balm to him and he basked delightedly in the warmth of the family environment, of which, when all was said and done, fate had deprived him. All the things they were discussing had been so very, very long ago, and yet he felt almost as though they had occurred only yesterday.

"Enough of that, chatterboxes," Marya Bakhareva cut in sternly when the merriment reached a high point. To her mind all this mirth was indecent because Privalov, after all, was a stranger and liable to cast a slur upon her daughters' behaviour. "Here we are, speaking of trifles all this time, and you not saying a word about yourself, Sergei," she declared.

"I really don't know what to say," Privalov objected.

"Haven't you spent fifteen years in the capital? Don't say there's nothing worth telling. We've lived a rustic kind of life all this time, yet found so much to tell you," Bakhareva insisted.

"Really, Mother," Nadine intervened. "Whatever Sergei Alexandrovich has to say about his business affairs will be too deep for us anyhow."

"But after fifteen years, my dear!" her mother pressed. "Even a sarafan would have things to relate after fifteen years, what with moths attacking it and one thing and another. Sergei wasn't put away like a sarafan in a box."

He was among living people, living himself all those years."

Bakhareva's words stunned Privalov. In retrospect he had to admit that he had not lived, not, at least, in the sense his hostess meant. First it had been the University, then seven years had slipped by in endless litigations concerning the inheritance—in the painful monotony of diverse terms, papers, business appointments and visits to offices and departments. Life, he had thought then, could wait. He had put it off year after year. Yet, as he realized this moment, thirty years of it were already behind him. Bakhareva's question, posed with true feminine intuition, greatly embarrassed Privalov. His back was to the wall. Should he remain silent, his hostess would be sure to interpret it in some derogatory way. He had no choice, and spoke of his University, his professors and the diversions of city life.

"What about women?" Victor Bakharev thought to himself frivolously, a picture of Petersburg's *demi-monde* rising in his mind's eye.

## VIII

In the evening of that auspicious day the following took place in Vasily Bakharev's study. The old man was reclining on the sofa, paler than usual. Nadine, with flushed face and shining eyes, was perched on the low wooden stool her father used to support his bad leg.

"Don't you see, dear?" the girl was saying, snuggling up to her father. "To be a thing which everyone has the right to inspect and—and. . . . No, papa, it touches me on the raw. I resent it. It's loathsome. Take Privalov's visit today: if I didn't have to appear before him as a piece of merchandise, I should have been much nicer to him."

"What has Privalov done to fall into your bad graces?" Bakharev smiled benevolently.

"Well, to begin with, take Khiona," the girl said. "What concern is all this of hers? Yet there she was, on the spot, with her insinuating leers, whispering abominable rot in my ear, rolling her eyes at Privalov and myself. He must have felt awfully foolish. I did."

"Don't you know I never invite Khiona? It's your mother's doing."

"I shan't marry Privalov. Just to spite Mother and Khiona. You'll see! I've told Mother I refuse to act like a besieged stronghold."

"By all means, but I still don't see where Sergei Privalov fits into the picture."

"Well, look at it this way," Nadine explained. "Millionaire Privalov comes to our house, and whether I like it or not, I am introduced to him. As I get to know him better I discover his astounding talents, merits and virtues. To cut a long story short, I come to think how nice it would be to become Mrs. Privalova. Wouldn't thousands of girls think the same in my place?"

"I can't make head or tail of it," Bakharev retorted. "Is it the stupid word 'suitor' that upsets you so much? Think of Privalov simply as of a fine, upright, clever young man."

"No! Wait!" Nadine interrupted. "That's not all of it. Let's presume we're not talking about a millionaire by the name of Privalov, but of a millionaire by the name of, say, Sidorov. We receive this Sidorov, and I discover every possible human virtue in him. Then I begin to think how nice it would be to become Mrs. Sidorova. It follows, therefore, that it's a matter of my being of marriageable age, and of getting married, no matter who comes to our house."

"Nobody is forcing you into marriage, Nadine," her father interrupted.

"Oh, Father, I love you for that—but what about Mother, Dosifeya, Luka, Khiona? They've all gone mad," Nadine continued.

"Indeed. But you can't blame people for something they cannot understand."

"Well, just to show them how silly they are I shan't ever marry," Nadine retorted.

"By all means." Bakharev laughed. "We'll pack you off to a nunnery. Ha, ha, ha. My poor, poor daughter, you can't be well today. But please don't reproach Mother. It's a sin. Life is long, Nadine. You'll have ample time to change your mind a dozen times."

He told his daughter about the state of Privalov's affairs and recounted diverse episodes from the family histories of the Gulyayevs and Privalovs. The girl listened avidly to his stories, and then said:

"Whatever you say, papa, even the best of them were beasts. It's inconceivable—all that petty tyranny, that stupid despotism and brutality. Poor, poor Varvara, Privalov's mother—she must have had a terrible time!"

"Yes, the poor soul went off her head." Bakharev sighed. "But let's return to young Privalov. His coming to Uzel is like coming to an entirely new place—even worse. D'you know, dear, what undid the Privalovs? Lack of character. They were all either a model of kindness or a model of beastliness. No idea of the golden mean."

"What of Sergei Privalov?" Nadine put in. "Is he the same as the others?"

"Sergei? Well, Sergei and Konstantin have read too much. That means they would be putty in anyone's hands. As a boy Sergei was a real little beast—either you *could* twist him round your little finger, or you *couldn't*. He was a typical Privalov. But who knows? He may have changed."

## IX

The Privalovs and Bakharevs had always been closely connected.

The Privalovs, being mill-owners, were widely known in the Urals. Their famous Shatrov Mills sprawled upon a million acres of the world's richest soil. Like most Ural mill-owners, the later Privalov generations chose to live in idle luxury, leaving their mills to the tender mercies of serf stewards. It was inevitable in the circumstances that the mills ran to seed and were likely to come under the hammer. But a happy chance saved them. In the mid-forties Alexander Privalov, the owner of the Shatrov Mills, married the daughter of Pavel Gulyayev, an eminent and wealthy owner of several gold-mines. The immediate result of that union was the birth of Sergei Privalov, our hero. His appearance in the world was celebrated with princely pomp. Cannons were fired, veritable rivers of champagne flowed lavishly, and for a whole month invited and uninvited guests were feasted in the Privalov mansion. Pavel Gulyayev gave his infant grandson a present of ten poods of gold.

Sergei Privalov had only vague recollections of his grandfather, a tall, bent, grey-haired old man with extraordinary lively eyes. He loved his grandson to distraction and often said to him:

"You're all I have—in the whole world."

The six-year-old boy naturally failed to grasp the meaning of his strange words and stared open-mouthed at his grandfather. The fact was that in spite of his millions Gulyayev thought himself the unhappiest man in the world for having no sons, only a daughter, Varvara, who was wedded to Privalov.

"What's a daughter?" the old sectarian reasoned. "A daughter is like the spring water: you wait for it, you rejoice when it comes, but it comes, and it goes."

Pavel Gulyayev was of old Arkhangelsk stock. His forefathers had fled from their ravaged sectarian colonies to the Urals, where, for an entire century, they sought refuge in the woods and in out-of-the-way sectarian hide-outs, before settling down in the Shatrov Mills. Like other mill-owners, the Privalovs openly harboured all escaped serfs and vagabonds, because that gaudy lot was their chief source of man-power. They particularly favoured the sectarians, because there was something sectarian about themselves. A judicious application of coin to silver various palms kept their charges out of all kinds of trouble. When early in the century gold was discovered in Eastern Siberia, in the heart of the Yenisei taiga, Pavel Gulyayev was among the first to go there. In some ten years he rose from an ordinary worker to become owner of one of Siberia's richest gold-mines. Solid as an oak, he returned to the Urals, and the loud reputation of a millionaire came with him. But he did not give up his residence in the Shatrov Mills, where he stayed between his trips into the taiga. The huge wooden house which Gulyayev built there for himself was a keep, a monastery, and a sumptuously appointed mansion all in one. It breathed that strange variety of old-time ostentation, in which tyranny and violence and all the sinister aspects of serfdom flourished alongside the loftiest manifestations of the human soul and intellect. Life ran its course in it along lines of ancient piety, to which everything else was totally subordinated.

As we have said, Gulyayev had just one daughter, Varvara, whom he loved and did not love, all at the same time, simply because she was a daughter, whereas he, the stubborn old man, had wanted a son. Conceivably enough, the surplus feeling he harboured for his non-existent son was lavished upon others. A veritable crowd of orphans—boys and girls—found shelter under the Gulyayev roof. For the most part they were children of per-

secuted sectarians languishing in prisons and gaols. The children came from all the places where the sect still existed—Vetka, the Kerzhenets forests, Irghiz, Starodubye and the Chernoramensky sectarian convents, etc. They made up something of a single family, basking in the sun of Gulyayev's hospitality. Brought up along strict sectarian lines by a host of sectarian dogmatists—male and female—the boys were sent into the gold-mines when they grew up, while the girls were either married or kept in patient expectation of that inevitable event.

"Well, how's my nest?" Gulyayev would ask on returning from his far-away gold-mines.

His "nest" infused an entirely fresh current into the Gulyayev ménage. Something of a domestic cult evolved round the imposing figure of the old sectarian, its master. "Pavel Gulyayev said so" or "That is how Pavel Gulyayev does it"—was the long and the short of it. His word was law. Many solid men, men known throughout the Urals and Siberia, were feathered in Gulyayev's nest. The Kolpakovs, Poluyanovs and Bakharevs—all of them were its fledglings. Along with a haven and fatherly love, they were there imparted a moral fibre which distinguished them from all other people. They perpetuated such traits of the Gulyayev character as stamina, will-power, vigour and unflinching loyalty to the old faith—traits, in a word, that qualified them as the powerful men they were.

Vasily Bakharev and Marya, known in the Gulyayev household as Vasya and Masha, had been the old man's special favourites. Both of them orphans, they had taken firm root in the Gulyayev house. As became a woman, Marya Bakhareva cloaked her past in a mantle of hallowed recollections. Towering above everybody else were the distinctive figures of old Gulyayev himself, of his wife, and of their daughter Varvara, later married to Alexander Privalov. Naturally enough, Marya Bakhareva re-



garded Sergei Privalov, the son of her bosom friend and playmate, with a mother's eyes. The sight of him brought up a succession of portraits in her memory of people dear to her heart. It had been Gulyayev's doing that Vasily Bakharev came to marry Marya. The old man simply called Marya to his study one day and, pointing at Vasily, said, "There, Masha, is a husband for you. Some day you'll thank me for the choice." The girl fell to her knees—an act of grateful submission. That had been all. In a fortnight the two were married after the old sectarian custom.

"Look after him, Masha," was all Gulyayev said to Marya when blessing the newly-weds, and later added, "Vasya's my right hand. That's all I can say."

Bakharev had indeed been Gulyayev's closest assistant, kept by the old man at his side ever since the boy was ten. They had traversed Siberia together from end to end, and with time Bakharev became an indispensable part of Gulyayev himself.

When Gulyayev was giving his daughter away to Privalov, he said to Bakharev, "He'd never have had my Varvara. Just a stroke of luck for him. I didn't have him in mind when I was raising my little flower; but fate is fate, can't get away from it. The Privalov breed—it's a good breed. And I hate to see the mills run to seed. Well, anyhow, it's too late now, like crying over spilt milk."

Varvara Gulyayeva's marriage was even stranger than Marya Bakhareva's. The latter had at least reason to suspect long in advance that she was Bakharev's intended. She had had the opportunity of growing accustomed to the idea. The millionaire's own daughter, on the other hand, had never seen her husband-to-be until the hour of her wedding, just as he had never seen her. He had insisted on having at least a glimpse of her before the matchmaking, and was allowed this privilege by way of an exception. But he saw no more of her than what he

could catch sight of through the key-hole from a room into which he was locked for that purpose. It had been a marriage of convenience: firstly, to save the Shatrov Mills from ruin, and, secondly, to join two of the best-known families in the Urals. As for his son-in-law, Gulyayev had never liked him. He only respected his name, and it was to that name that Varvara had been sacrificed.

Old Gulyayev was overjoyed by the birth of a grandson. The event made him feel years younger. He coddled and nursed little Sergei like he would have coddled and nursed that cherished son of his own, for whom he had waited vainly all his life.

"My day has come at last," he used to say to Vasily Bakharev. "He's my sole heir. Remember that when I'm gone. Sergei is to get everything. I say so."

Nobody knew or cared how Varvara Gulyayeva fared in her new home. The girl shared the fate of other wealthy brides: everyone envied her her good luck, represented in the public's eye by the combined Gulyayev and Privolov fortunes. She, who was wealthy herself, was marrying into a wealthy family. All the unvarnished aspirations and designs of that day, and of our day, too, were enveloped in that fatal formula. Her husband was weak-willed and kind, and loved her in his own way. Long before the wedding Gulyayev had built her a veritable palace in the nearby town of Uzel, which he himself had visited just once, on the occasion of his grandson's birth. His own old nest was too much a part of his flesh and blood for him to give up in favour of the Uzel mansion. His relations with his son-in-law were somewhat strange: firstly, he gave him nothing save the house and the dowry; secondly, he could not bear his presence and ridiculed him cruelly, too cruelly perhaps, both to his face and behind his back. But the mills survived thanks to Gulyayev's capital, though they passed into the old man's complete trust. Only later, when Gulyayev grew older

still, did he bequeath some of his Siberian gold-mines to his son-in-law, but, as before, left Bakharev in total charge of all his interests.

That was how things stood to Gulyayev's dying day. The old man even died in a way unlike other people. A messenger brought Bakharev a curt note to the taiga: "Vasya, hurry to my funeral." It was midsummer. Work at the gold-mines was at its height. But Bakharev abandoned everything and hurried post-haste to the Shatrov Mills. When his carriage stopped before the porch of Gulyayev's house the sick old man opened his eyes and uttered, "That's Vasya." In point of fact, he did not look ill. Nothing of the fatal ailment was reflected in his appearance.

"No, Vasya, it's the end," he whispered weakly when Bakharev sought to reassure him. "I've just waited for you to come. I must speak to you. Everything I have goes to my grandson, to Sergei. Don't abandon him. And look after Varvara—the poor girl will have many a heartache now that I'm gone."

Gulyayev refused to see his son-in-law even when on his death-bed. At night, several hours after Bakharev's return, he fell asleep in the arms of his daughter and his faithful manager, never to wake again.

The old man's prophecy was soon to come true.

After his death everything in his house and in the Privalov home was turned topsy-turvy. The old man, the terror, was no more, and Alexander Privalov let himself go. He laughed when told that Gulyayev had left all his fortune to his grandson. As his own son's trustee he took charge of all the Gulyayev interests. The old Gulyayev nest was ravaged, and in the sumptuous Privalov mansion things came to pass that are the object of countless incredible legends to this very day. All Bakharev's efforts, and those of Privalov's wife, to safeguard Sergei's interests, were of no

avail. Alexander Privalov had waited too long, had swallowed too much from his father-in-law, to let anything stand in his way. Just then the rich gold-fields were discovered in the heart of the Sayan Range. The find had actually been Bakharev's, but he had had to take Privalov in as a partner. Though very close to old Gulyayev and for many years in charge of Gulyayev's fortune, Bakharev himself had little or nothing of his own to start with, apart from a working knowledge of the mining business and plenty of dash and vigour. Failures only spurred him on, and he surmounted seemingly insuperable obstacles. Prospecting in the Sayan Mountains had exhausted his savings to the last kopek and he was compelled to make Privalov a partner, i.e., to proceed with his enterprise on Privalov's money. Privalov trusted him blindly. The first deposit, discovered on the bank of a nameless mountain stream, was named Varvarinsk after Privalov's wife. In ten years, all through the eighteen forties, it yielded a net profit of over ten million rubles. Alexander Privalov was thus put into the possession of a fabulous fortune, and disposed of it in his own way, a way that led to his wife's death.

Privalov's monstrous wealth went to furnish a life unexampled in the annals of the Urals. The multi-millionaire, much like some French monarch, was prepared to pay tens of thousands of rubles for something new, something refreshing in the way of entertainment, something that, if only for a moment, would bring his over-indulged, deadened nerves back to life. The Gulyayev mansion in Uzel was furnished with princely splendour. What went on within its walls defies the imagination in this, our calculating, penny-pinching age. Suffice it to say that the Russian character had its full, unrestrained fling. From morning to night the Privalov palace wallowed in voluptuousness. Every welcome and unwelcome guest was feasted there. And at the same time, in the same house,

in a secret chapel, endless sectarian services were held round the clock. Often Privalov and his guests would go down to the prayer-rooms from their drunken orgies, and beat their foreheads black and blue against the floor while bowing devoutly to the deities. All sense of restraint evaporated, the golden mean of life was flung overboard. Life brimmed over the top, engulfing everything that lay in its path. Ordinary luxuries, ordinary extravagance soon lost their appeal. They sufficed no longer. A kind of savage debauch succeeded them. The road was laid with red broadcloth for miles ahead for the drunken company to drive along it in hot-blooded troikas; the horses were given champagne to drink instead of water, and were even bathed in champagne. Countless guests found a second home in the Privalov mansion, and a veritable harem of beauties recruited from among Privalov's serfs ministered to their lusts.

Alexander Privalov went berserk. Wine and women no longer stimulated his deadened sensibilities, benumbed by wanton depravity. It had come to a stage when he needed groans, wails, the sight and smell of blood to arouse him.

Sashka Kholostov, a retired Cossack officer, ruled supreme in his entourage. This Sashka, an athletically built giant, could drink a dozen bottles of champagne without batting an eyelid and take on full-grown bears single-handed in mortal combat to entertain his patron. The man was a veritable beast born by mistake in human shape. He held sway in the mansion, and Privalov would not let him out of his sight even for an hour. They even slept in one bedroom. Privalov needed only to say that he was bored, and Sashka instantly thought up something to divert him. But the round of pleasures given to man is extremely limited. Soon Sashka had to resort to downright outrages. Privalov's unhappy wife, naturally, had no sympathy for the ugly facts of the life that sur-

rounded her. Though brought up in unquestioning submission to a husband's authority, she—woman, wife and mother—refused to reconcile herself to the orgies that went on in her house, under her very nose. Lonely, utterly lost in this vortex, she could do little more than detest Sashka with all her soul, thinking him the root of all the iniquity. So Sashka began with her.

At first he fanned Privalov's marital passions, rousing him to jealousy. Varvara's every glance and gesture were closely watched. Eavesdroppers were set upon her. Sashka's evil genius went to all lengths of invention in this monstrous persecution. The wealthy heiress soon lost her mind and died in Bakharev's home, where she was brought more dead than alive after one of the corporal "lessons" administered by her husband.

Sergei Privalov was then about seven. He scarcely remembered his mother, but her lavish funeral remained deeply imprinted in his memory. Recollections of his father also blended with that sombre occasion. Alexander Privalov was then about forty-five, broad-shouldered, somewhat hunched, with a bloated yellow face and restless, lacklustre grey eyes, deep furrows creasing his brow, his hair too thin to conceal the bald patch on his head, and his lips perpetually twisted in an ugly grin. The sight of his father struck terror into the boy's tender soul, and he was unspeakably glad to hear him say to Bakharev right after the funeral, "Here, take Sergei. Do what you want with him. But, for God's sake, take him away from here."

After his wife's death Alexander Privalov ran amuck. All hell ran loose in his house. Orgies raged in it at night, and in the daytime, the blood of his serfs flowed freely for his entertainment, cries of pain and agony carried far and wide.

The mischief culminated in a succession of precipitous events. Privalov imported a Gypsy song-and-dance

troupe' from Moscow, headed by Styosha, a black-eyed beauty. The prima donna herded him into wedlock and then became Sashka's mistress under her husband's very nose. Malicious gossip soon reached Privalov, opening his eyes to the infamy flourishing in his house. He resolved to make an example of his faithless wife and disloyal friend by the simple expedient of immuring them in a wall. But his magnificent scheme was foiled by the crafty Gypsy woman. At night, with Sashka's assistance, she flung him out of a third-storey window, and his stiff corpse was found in the garden next morning.

Privalov was succeeded by three sons: Sergei, the eldest, from his first wife, and Ivan and Tit from Styosha. Soon after her husband's death the prima donna married Sashka, who was appointed guardian of the under-age heirs. It is readily imagined what kind of a guardian he made. In some five years the little that was left of Privalov's fortune was squandered wantonly, and the mills were on the brink of total ruin. Bakharev stepped into the picture at that point with his usual vigour, and Sashka could do no more than mortgage non-existent stocks of metal to the state bank. This was done in the following manner: first he mortgaged a lot of pig iron, then the first reduction of it and finally the assorted iron ostensibly produced from the latter. Of course, Sashka Kholostov could scarcely have played a lone hand in this crafty transaction, and enlisted the help of the mining inspector and other officials. In any case, the wily stroke brought him a full million, but soon the shady deal was exposed and the culprit brought to trial. The proceedings dragged on for fifteen years. They began under the old judicial system, passed through dozens of legal stages and were spun out until the hour of Kholostov's death. The debt he had incurred was then transferred to the mills.

One thing Kholostov failed to do was to lay his hands on the remnants of the Gulyayev fortune, bequeathed

to the eldest heir. Bakharev made two trips to Petersburg to defend Sergei Privalov's interests and finally won his point: the Gulyayev share—at least the remnants of it, since Alexander Privalov had made no distinction between his own and his wife's property and had squandered much of it—was apportioned to Sergei Privalov. Sergei was also given the Privalov mansion in Uzel, which had been part of his mother's dowry. Even in his father's lifetime the boy had lived with the Bakharevs, and after Alexander Privalov's death old Bakharev was appointed his guardian and went out of his way to give the orphan an education. Sergei Privalov stayed with the Bakharevs for a good many years and attended school with their eldest son, Konstantin. As for the other two heirs, Styosha took them to Moscow soon after Sashka Kholostov was put on trial, and saw to their education herself. Since the Shatrov Mills alone, of all Alexander Privalov's property, had remained unparcelled in view of the heir's young age, Bakharev, acting in Sergei Privalov's interests, became one of the state-appointed trustees. He did much to raise the earning capacity of the once famous mills, and achieved his goal at last when his eldest-born, Konstantin, accepted the managership of the Shatrov enterprises after he was graduated from University.

## X

The years Sergei Privalov spent in the Bakharev home remained for ever among his most cherished memories. Whatever he had learned to love and respect was associated in his mind with the Bakharevs.

His stay with them had been a counterpart of the measured rhythm in Pavel Gulyayev's own mansion. Marya devoutly observed the customs and manners, rules and rites observed in the Gulyayev home. To violate even an



iota of the canons of that extinct family, which for an entire century had been to all a pillar of old-time piety, seemed a sacrilege to her. The Gulyayev spirit reigned supreme in the Bakharev household, the Bakharev family traditions were built upon it, and it seemed to infuse new strength into them in all emergencies. The career of a gold-miner, after all, was beset with countless vicissitudes, with precipitous ups and downs, and in Vasily Bakharev's career such ups and downs had been particularly plentiful. Monstrous profits and enervating losses succeeded one another. Changing fortunes played a prominent part in his life, lending it a special glamour.

Sergei Privalov stayed with the Bakharevs until he was fifteen. Then, with his friend Konstantin, he went to Petersburg, where he spent the next fifteen years until his return to Uzel.

In the interim great changes had shaken the Bakharev home. To begin with, it was partitioned into two halves: Marya Bakhareva's, and the old man's. In reality, the division applied chiefly to Marya Bakhareva, who in ten years did not cross the threshold of her husband's domain. Bakharev and the children disregarded the partition, and made equal use of both halves. The division sprang from a tortuous succession of misunderstandings and dissent. The children were growing up. The time had come to educate them. Vasily Bakharev, who associated with the motley mob of gold-miners and met all kinds of people, thought that the exclusive spirit of sectarian dogmatism was unfit schooling for his offspring. He was intent on giving his children the best possible secular education, on launching them in life, and then letting them shift for themselves. In Siberia he had often encountered well-bred, decent people, and had sensed the great power of knowledge. He wished nothing more fervently than to see his children properly educated. But

his ideas were resolutely rebuffed by his wife who had lived a lifetime in a cloistered sectarian environment and refused to hear of any innovations. After a prolonged siege she finally let her husband do what he wished with her sons, but would at no price agree to have her daughters "foreignized." At that point, however, the situation changed in old Bakharev's favour, for in his sons he had a certain precedent and allies of a sort. They brought a fresh jet of worldliness into the Bakharev household; their very presence spoke of a different world. After prolonged bickering Marya Bakhareva made a new concession: she surrendered the elder girl, Nadine, to her husband's wishes, but put her foot down with finality with regard to her youngest child, Vera.

"You've taken Nadine from me, so the sin is on your head," she summarized her latest decision. "Oh, if only Pavel Gulyayev were alive."

"Masha, Masha," Bakharev pleaded, "people are different these days, times have changed."

"You can have them, your different people," was all she said to that.

This was when Marya Bakhareva insisted on having the house partitioned. It was her final gesture of protest.

Pleading for his children's education, Vasily Bakharev, unnoticed by himself, imbibed of the worldly spirit, came in contact with new people, and the shape of new ways took gradual root in his half of the house. In that domain Nadine, dearest of all his family to Bakharev's heart, took over the duties of housekeeper the day she was twelve. Her father liked to discuss his business affairs with her and often told her his most intimate thoughts. This unique friendship between father and daughter evolved with time into a very distinct way of life. They spoke of different things in his half of the house, their round of interests was different, too, and their language. They were always quick to understand

each other, to catch the drift of each other's words and gestures.

Bakharev was also very fond of his eldest son, Konstantin, but the latter scarcely ever lived at home, and when, on completing his studies, he returned under the parental roof, father and son soon had the falling-out which Luka reported to Privalov. As a matter of fact, Konstantin was just as headstrong as his father, and, as the saying goes, two bears cannot live peacefully in one den. After a heated argument the two drifted apart, though the object of their quarrel had, in fact, been a mere trifle. This circumstance put Nadine and her father on an even more intimate footing, so that Vasily Bakharev could not live a day without his daughter. The girl realized that he was instinctively seeking in her what he had lost in his eldest son—the support he sorely needed in his advancing old age—and did all she could to rise to her father's world outlook, proving fully successful in this undertaking.

Strange as it may seem, the warmest spot in Marya Bakhareva's heart was occupied by her son Victor. He never tried to escape from her authority, always asked forgiveness for his misdeeds, repented with tear-filled eyes, and made countless promises to turn over a new leaf. As the years went by, his childish pranks developed into real vices. Victor no longer begged his mother's forgiveness, rather depending on time and his mother's loving heart to heal all wounds. Expelled from school in his third year, he remained idle, and Vasily Bakharev gave him up for lost. Kind by nature, intelligent in his own way, Victor was the sort of man who wore his heart on his sleeve, which meant that he lacked the moral fibre to resist evil influences. He was changeable, lively, impressionable, ceaselessly in quest of something worthwhile to do. And never finding it. He had been a soap manufacturer, a technician, a gem prospector; now he

was a vinegar manufacturer, because his father flatly refused to finance any more of his schemes. Vasily Bakharev was inclined to wink at many things which concerned his younger son, just so his wife should not be unduly upset, and often pretended complete ignorance of the bitter truth. Victor made up for all his frustrations by diverse feats, in which he knew no equal. To stage a row in the local club, break the windows of some pious widow's domicile, hiss an actress off the stage, or manhandle a cabby—all this had become part and parcel of his repertoire and won him enviable renown among the local ne'er-do-wells. Marya Bakhareva sought to blame her wayward son's misbehaviour on his green age, and tried to correct him with home-made remedies. In extreme cases she threatened to tell Father, but this innocent threat had been repeated in stereotyped form much too often to have any effect upon even a less audacious individual than Victor.

Vera, or Veretta, as Victor christened her, or "dump-ling," was a close second in her mother's affections. She was a very ordinary girl who, above all else, loved a good meal, sound sleep, and girlish shrieks of laughter. She had an insuperable aversion to printed matter, and used it only as wrapping paper. Liked by all, she was thought a simple-minded bread-and-butter miss. But this description did not do her justice. Vera was a very practical girl, and her carefree pretty little head was sound and balanced. Girls of her type wait patiently for their man, then marry for money at their parent's bidding, raise a dozen ruddy-cheeked children, gradually develop into respectable, even forbidding, matrons, and then turn into kind, lovable old grandmothers who rear their grandchildren and the grandchildren's children, and live patiently on into their eighties. From childhood, Vera loved to be with Dosifeya in the kitchen, the laundry, the cellar and pantry; she helped her pickle cabbage,

raised flowers and was for ever fussing with homeless kittens, whom she patiently nursed and then gave away to various acquaintances. With the years she developed a practical turn of mind and at sixteen virtually ran the entire household, remaining in the shade with the cunning of a born diplomat. The house rang to her loud voice and contagious laughter. Yet Vera was superstitious, firmly convinced that all portents and dreams inevitably came true. As devout as a nun, she stood through the longest of the long sectarian services held in her mother's chapel. None knew better than Vera how to deal with visiting sectarian pilgrims or itinerant dogmatists, to appease a weeping child, to help the halt and blind, and to comfort old men and women. She always had a kind word for the unfortunate, knew how to solace and share in a neighbour's grief, and was even capable of shedding a tear when the occasion demanded. But she also knew how to hate. It was very difficult indeed to provoke her, but once provoked, she was not one to forget and forgive.

## XI

Privalov's return to Uzel created a sensation. It was on everyone's lips. Fantastic stories were circulated of his arrival, his every step and word. People dragged skeletons out of the Privalov family closet. A bizarre legend evolved in which truth intertwined with gross forgery, and falsehood with reality. The names of Alexander Privalov, Gulyayev, Sashka Kholostov and Styosha were resurrected. Legends, fables, eye-witness accounts, and all the embellishments concocted by well-meaning bored people, revolved round them as if they were names of mythical heroes. The restive, unbridled provincial imagination needed just a few days to lionize Privalov, while the latter unsuspectingly rested from his long journey

at the "Golden Anchor." Rumour inflated his inheritance to a hundred million. There was a persistent report of a buried treasure left behind by old Gulyayev. The past served as background for a story of the present whose hero, real, uninvented, whiled away his time in a ruble-a-day hotel room.

It was only natural that general attention fixed upon the obscure period of Sergei Privalov's life from which he had just emerged. What had he been doing in Petersburg? Why had he been there so long? What was the role of old Bakharev, and his other guardians? The public mind posed a veritable maze of questions, which called for shrewd guesses, sharp-witted explanations, intimate detail and eye-witness stories. There was no doubt in all minds that a woman was mixed up in it. Yes, unquestionably, and probably more than one—perhaps two, three, a dozen. *Cherchez la femme!* People were soon found who had either seen or heard something, or recollected what someone had said years ago, earnestly quoting most reliable sources—close acquaintances or their next of kin, who were never known to lie; who, most laudably, always spoke the truth. Very soon everybody learned that Privalov had sown his wild oats in the company of Petersburg's upper stratum of ne'er-do-wells. The accounts were complete with word pictures of his mistresses, who all had stereotyped French names, with descriptions of the presents he had made them at different times in the shape of bouquets made from hundred-ruble banknotes, of fabulous diamonds and of princely mansions.

But only the giddier brains dwelled upon facts of that kind. The sober section of Uzel society showed little interest in all this nonsense and concentrated upon the reason of Privalov's sudden arrival, speculating on two highly significant facts. Firstly, that Privalov stayed in a ruble-a-day hotel room, and, secondly, that he called

on the Bakharevs the day after he arrived. The first was thought to mean that Privalov had turned over a new leaf, that he had for ever given up Blanche and Suzette, and meant to devote himself to sagacious economic pursuits, or that he wanted to be original, or remain incognito. It was much harder to explain the second circumstance. What had made Privalov call on Bakharev so soon after his arrival in Uzel? Why had he, Privalov, not paid a similar visit to his guardians? Was this a sign of his displeasure? Had it all a connection, perhaps, with Bakharev's highly suspicious ailment? Finally, maybe Privalov simply wanted to marry one of Bakharev's daughters? People wondered how Privalov's guardians would react if his failure to call on them had been a challenge. Indeed, there was much food for thought. Even a bigger place than Uzel would have been agog.

"I'm surprised at Khiona Zaplatina," Agrippina Veryovkina, a full-fledged member of the Uzel *beau monde*, repeated significantly several times. "Just think: on the morning of the day Privalov arrived she sent her Matryona to inform me about it. Haven't seen her since. I can't understand it!"

But Khiona had no time for her bosom friend. She had even lost count of the days and nights, so embroiled was she in all kinds of most pressing trifles preparing Privalov's residence in her little house. It was the most difficult problem she had ever confronted. But first we must relate how it came to pass.

When dining at the Bakharevs' Khiona struck upon the idea of having Privalov stay at her house. It was a daring scheme, but Khiona tackled it bold as a lion, encouraged by the information she gathered through Matryona from various sources, and by Privalov's stay in a ruble-a-day hotel room. But she did not know how to put it into practice. Should she suggest it to him her-

self? Wouldn't that be too presumptuous? Yet Victor Zaplatin, her husband, was entirely unfit for a diplomatic mission of that kind. There was just one other expedient: to act through the Bakharevs. But how?

Khiona Zaplatina pursued her goal with Machiavelian cunning, because she had to reckon with Marya Bakhareva who was shrewd and headstrong.

First, she deplored that Privalov could not stay with the Bakharevs: God only knows what people might say. Then she discoursed at length upon present-day young men, who affect loose manners, particularly in Petersburg, the capital. This did not apply to Privalov, of course, who stood above all possible gossip, but, after all, in a provincial town a young man would find it terribly dull, and might take a fancy to someone. Worse still, he might fall in with the wrong company. No question of it, Privalov was the best match Nadine could hope for, yet they should get to know him better first, for he may have changed. Who knows? Now if. . . .

Marya Bakhareva saw through Khiona's game, and hesitated a bit before promising support.

"Just for a time," Khiona pressed her point. "Privalov wouldn't want to live permanently in a hovel like mine. You know, of course, how devoted I am to you. If I'm going out of my way this time, it isn't for my own gain, but all for Nadine. She's such a child, such a. . . . You don't know her true worth, Marya! Furthermore, they will all angle for Privalov. Zosya Lyakhovskaya, Anna Polovodova, Liza Veryovkina—they're all looking for husbands. Needless to say, they can't compare with Nadine, but to make assurance doubly sure. . . ."

"Aha," thought Marya Bakhareva listening to Zaplatina's honeyed speeches, "Khiona may even want to palm off our suitor into other hands. Seems, I'll have to give her a bracelet."



"You don't know what snobs those Lyakhovskys and Polovodovs are," Zaplatina continued. "Believe me, they're dreaming, yes, dreaming, of ensnaring him now that he's here."

Privalov instantly agreed when Marya Bakhareva proposed that he should move into the Zaplatin house. He did not even ask how many rooms he would have there, and where the house was.

"It's the tall lady we had for dinner. Remember?" Bakhareva told him. "An educated woman, and works for her living. Very talkative at times, but clever."

Privalov thanked her, his mind focussed on something else. "I don't need much. She won't jump down my throat, I expect. But her name's so hard to remember."

"We all call her Khina," Bakhareva replied. "That's easier than Khiona."

"Khina," Privalov repeated indifferently.

When Zaplatina informed her husband of her new boarder's name, he looked at her unbelievably at first, then said with approval:

"A female genius! How did you catch the big fish! To live side by side with a millionaire! What satanic craftiness, devil take it!"

And the female genius said, "The Lyakhovskys and Polovodovs will be furious. I can see them squirm! Ha, ha!"

Khiona harboured no far-reaching ambitions. She wanted most to pique the Lyakhovskys and Polovodovs. As for other ways of profiting by the situation, God was merciful, she had not yet taken inventory of all the possibilities. One thing was clear: her stock among her townsmen would soar rapidly. A young man, a suitor of exceptional worth, and virtually in her hands! She could dance from joy. People would wait upon her, would grovel at her feet, and she looking down at them and smiling.

"As for him, we'll wait and see," she mused, recalling what she had promised Marya Bakhareva. "Nadine's nose is too high in the air. She isn't much of a bird to judge by the plumage. Lyakhovsky may be a snob and a miser, but his Zosya is the real thing if you ask me. Aye, that prude Nadine can't touch her!"

Khiona made her monologue before the mirror, from which a sallow face looked back at her with the expression of a bird of prey that had seized upon delicious pickings. The worthy dame shook a finger at herself playfully, muttering:

"But see you don't overreach yourself, Khiona. Easy does it! Your day will come. The Lyakhovskys and Polovodovs will still squirm. Ha, ha, ha! Yes, gentlemen, you'll have to eat humble pie, and no mistake."

In her bliss Khiona Zaplatina made a *pas des nymphes*, which she had learned in the dim past at her boarding-school.

## XII

Furnishing Privalov's rooms was an exacting, time-consuming task which Zaplatina completed brilliantly in the next few days. Three middle-sized rooms were fitted out cosy as a nest. The furniture, the tapestry, the flowers and paintings, were all modest, comfortable, and in excellent taste. Matryona had made up to a dozen trips to question Privalov's man, Ipat, about the ways of his master, about his flat in Petersburg, his furniture, his carpets, and what flowers he liked best, etc. Zaplatina used the information to good effect in appointing his rooms, of which one was to be the reception-room, the other the study, and the third the bedroom.

Privalov was pleasantly surprised. The cosy little flat struck his fancy.

"You've probably gone to undue expense," he said. "Permit me to refund you for the furnishings."

"Oh dear, no! Why? It's a trifle, no more. I'd do anything to please you. Of course, I can't fit things out with the extravagance to which you are, no doubt, accustomed..." she chanted.

"Don't say that," Privalov interrupted. "I'm fond of simple things."

Khiona Zaplatina was delighted. Though lying was second nature to her, she was speaking the truth at that moment: she really would do anything for Privalov, and not with an ulterior motive as was her custom, but simply because Privalov required it, because it would please him. Privalov's simple-hearted praise made what little blood still coursed under her withered skin rush to her face. The very prospect of entering into a close relationship with a real millionaire went to her head. She was touched by the instinct that moves all true artists, wishing to serve the corporal embodiment of the great Privalov fortune like a Brahman serves his Brahma. A magic force was locked in her little rooms, a force which attracted general interest like a magnet. That was more than enough for her. Having changed her usual role, she moved about in a daze for some time. Even narrow and self-seeking souls are capable of such inward enlightenment and spiritual transports when, not calculating for once, their acts are inspired.

Her business done, Khiona assumed a wait-and-see attitude. Privalov's man, a gloomy, sour-faced individual, brought his master's things in a carriage. Khiona, Matryona and Victor Zaplatin watched him with bated breath from behind corners and door-frames, while he carried in Privalov's suit-cases.

"They're full of money," Matryona commented, addressing her mistress familiarly in the heat of the moment. "Heavy! Awfully heavy!"

"Fool," Khiona rejoined tersely, "whoever keeps money at home?"

Matryona did, for one—the kopek coins about her own person, and the occasional ruble coins among her old rags. For this reason she threw a suspicious glance at her mistress to make sure her leg was not being pulled.

"They keep money in banks," Khiona explained. "It's safer there—what's more, the bank pays interest on it."

But Matryona still had her misgivings; she herself would never have put any of her loose silver in any bank. "Think I'm a fool, eh," she thought, pulling a silly face, "want me to believe it?"

Privalov was greatly relieved to be set up in his own flat. The three little rooms struck his fancy from the first and he began unpacking his travelling case with a sense of placid contentment. The case contained his most treasured possessions—an oil portrait of his mother, his books and all his business files. The portrait showed his mother when she was still very young—a woman with dark hair and large blue eyes. The eyes were Pavel Gulyayev's, with the same deep, thoughtful expression. Her slender thoroughbred hands with thin long fingers rested in the lap of a light-blue sarafan embroidered with silver flowers; a white muslin blouse draped a plump, somewhat tanned neck, adorned with a string of pearls. Her old-fashioned wimple almost completely concealed her smoothly brushed hair, and only a few loose curls escaped from under it at the temples, giving her a kind of childlike touch. Privalov's hair was much like his mother's, and he liked it for that.

"If you had only been alive!" he whispered, looking at the dimmed portrait, and sighed disconsolately. Never had he felt such pity for his mother, never wanted so much to have her by his side. Thoughts thronged in his head, but there was no one to share them with, to unburden his heart to. Privalov sensed keenly that something

new had entered his life, lighting it up, that something which had weighed on him only recently had, in some strange way, been lifted, opening up an unclouded future.

"Work! I must work!" he was thinking as he looked through his papers, these lifeless white sheets appearing new to him, as though he was seeing them for the first time.

Privalov spread a large plan of a flour mill on the table and studied it attentively for some time. The plan contained outhouses and service buildings, complete with a miniature watchman's cabin. Alongside, Privalov designed a five-windowed cottage in a little flower-garden. He drew the house quite mechanically, and in his imagination a fair girlish face with dark grey eyes and an enticing smile looked at him through one of its windows.

### XIII

Khiona Zaplatina celebrated her victory prematurely. Neither Lyakhovsky nor Polovodov came to pay their respects to Privalov, thus preserving every inch of their dignity. This both annoyed and surprised Khiona, because by a strange aptitude of human nature she regarded everything that concerned her lodger as having to do with herself. More than that, the lady was incensed with Privalov's attitude, because he, it seemed to her, was blind to his guardians' perfidy and preserved a maddening calm. She watched his every step keenly and shook her head contemptuously whenever he turned left on leaving the gates.

"Again," Khiona mouthed, as though every yard Privalov advanced towards the Bakharev house was an affront. "What's got into him? There's nothing particularly attractive about that Nadine. She lacks femininity. Men are absolutely blind! She's a blue stocking and. . . Pfui!"

It dawned on Khiona Zaplatina that her lodger, poor man, was a bit dull and had allowed the first girl he met to twist him round her little finger. She even called on Marya Bakhareva several times to ferret out the latest developments and see what Privalov was doing at her house. But she did not learn much. Privalov spent most of the time conversing with Marya, or in the old man's study. Nadine, Khiona felt, was even denser than her suitor. She was enticing him in a typically rustic manner. It was simply disgusting how she went out of her way to keep aloof of Privalov and to play the part of a theatrical *ingénue*, letting him see the tip of her shoe from under the hem of her dress, or making eyes at him like an ordinary chambermaid. "Nice little baggage! And Marya pretending that she doesn't see her learned daughter's little ways!" Khiona was touched on the raw by everything she now saw in the Bakharev household. She even suspected that Marya Bakhareva meant to manage affairs on her own, without her able assistance. The very thought of being left out of the game brought cold sweat to her brow. She was much too carried away by her new place in society.

"He comes too frequently," Marya Bakhareva was thinking of Privalov. "God forbid, people may start talking."

Privalov's every visit both pleased and worried her. She could not help seeing that Nadine attracted Privalov and that he unconsciously sought her company. But his advances, which she so fervently wished for in her heart, were developing much too quickly.

"You ought to visit Lyakhovsky," she urged Privalov maternally. "He may be a heathen, but he's the cleverest man in our town. And there's Polovodov."

"I mean to, but I keep postponing," Privalov replied.

"It's hard on you, I know," Marya Bakhareva sighed. "But it can't be helped. The old man says so, too."

In the end Bakhareva decided to talk to her daughter and see if there had been anything between the two. She had caught them deep in conversation on one occasion, and had pretended to have a headache, leaving them alone in the room, for she had no wish to stand in the way of "God's work," as she called matrimony. But when she broached the subject, Nadine only laughed strangely.

"Really, Mother, I can't make you out," Nadine said. "What makes you think I'm going to marry Privalov?"

"But what if you do?" her mother retorted. "There's nothing wrong in it; you don't want to be an old maid the rest of your life, reading those books of yours, do you? It's those new-fangled ideas of your father's! You'll soon be twenty-two, and don't even know better than grin about it. At your age I had three children. Konstantin was almost six. What's your father waiting for?"

"It's all Khina's doing, Mother," Nadine put in.

"Khina's? I don't need Khina to tell me what's right."

"I warn you, Mother, I shan't leave my room when Privalov calls. It isn't right. Just because a person is good to me you want at all costs to have him marry me. While we—we just want to be good friends, that's all."

"But you don't need a friend," Bakhareva continued, "you need a husband!"

"Don't let that trouble you, Mother. We'll advertise for one in the papers: 'So-and-so-much dowry, and a fine bride into the bargain.' I'll marry an officer!"

"Enough of that foolishness," Bakhareva snapped. "What did you talk to him about in the living-room last time for over an hour?"

"Do you insist on knowing?" Nadine asked.

"You don't have to tell if you don't want to," her mother replied, feigning indifference.

"Well, I'll tell you: I had been reading a book. Privalov and I discussed it."

"Well, you just keep on reading books, my dear, and Privalov will soon go to the Lyakhovskys and marry Zosya," her mother observed caustically.

"What of it, Mother? Zosya's a fine girl. Privalov isn't a bad chap either. They'll make a splendid couple. I'll be bridesmaid."

"Making light of what your mother says to you, eh?" Bakhareva replied sternly. "See it doesn't end in tears."

Vasily Bakharev wasn't well and did not leave his study. He always greeted Privalov cordially and spoke with him for hours about the trusteeship. Nadine recounted to him what her mother had told her, and he commented gravely:

"Your mother is old-fashioned, and you shouldn't make fun of her. You're free to act as you please. I don't want to force you into marrying anyone. But mother is right in her own way. In the old days it was mothers who took care of their children. Now you've got to see to yourself. I can only give you friendly advice. Where'll you find a suitable husband in Uzel? Several engineers and a hard-drinking Irkutsk merchant is all the choice you have. Privalov's different...."

"I should have loved him, Father, most likely, if I wasn't being foisted upon him as a bride."

"Goodness gracious! One might think you're an old maid that we want to dispose of," Bakharev exclaimed.

"We'd better change the subject, Father."

These talks with his daughter weighed heavily on old Bakharev's mind, but he tried to dispel his annoyance by joking or taking up his work. Nadine, meanwhile, gave little thought to Privalov, because her head was occupied with other things. To begin with, she was in a hurry to go to the Shatrov Mills to join her brother. She always felt at her best there. And now she was particularly anxious to go just to escape her ambiguous position of bride.



## XIV

Privalov scarcely noticed how time flew. The work he had been dreaming of made no headway. He kept postponing it from day to day. He did not quite know what attracted him to the Bakharevs, but the hours between visits dragged heavily. When alone he made himself tackle a book, or pored over the plan of his flour mill, and reviewed over and over in his mind everything that concerned Nadine.

One day they walked longer than usual in the garden at the back of the Bakharev house. Marya Bakhareva usually accompanied them on their walks, or deputed Vera, but this time she had visitors and Vera was out.

"Why don't you call on the Lyakhovskys?" Nadine asked as they were walking down the path.

"It's hard—not visiting Lyakhovsky, I mean, but going to the house my grandfather built. You know of the infamy that reigned within its walls, of course. My mother paid with her life for the privilege of living in it," Privalov replied.

"But apart from memories there's the present," Nadine reasoned.

"You mean the Shatrov Mills?"

"Yes. I often go there to stay with Konstantin, and we talk about you. Forty thousand people depend on the mills for their livelihood. Konstantin, you know, has his feet firmly on the ground, but he's a fanatic when it comes to the mills; that's why I love him so. I like the mills myself, and d'you know why—not because they represent a fortune, not even because our best family traditions are associated with them. No, I love them because of what they are, because of the sense of something wholesome, something new and powerful that they have about them. They are a new force in the fullest sense of the word."

They were sitting on a green garden bench. Nadine's face was flushed, her eyes were shining and looked even darker than usual; she had taken off her summer hat and was nervously fingering the cloth lilies-of-the-valley pinned to its rim. The conversation had quite naturally drifted to Privalov's plan. He was on the point of telling Nadine of his ambitions, but fell silent as he glanced at her. He had the impression that the girl edged away from him and was looking strangely down the path, where he caught sight of Vera in a bright canary dress.

"Let's go; Mother's expecting us for coffee," Nadine said, rising to her feet.

Everything Privalov had eagerly wanted to tell Nadine had to remain unsaid.

The chapel in Marya Bakhareva's half of the house was a long windowless room. A person unacquainted with the lay of the house could have looked for it all day without finding it. The entrance to it was through a dark little closet adjoining Marya's bedroom; the back wall of the closet was in fact the door to the chapel, and, to make discovery doubly hard, it was hung with an array of old fur-coats. One day, failing to find Bakhareva in the living-room, Privalov went straight to the chapel. She was there, behind a collapsible lectern, reading a canon to the Virgin Mary. Old women stood in the corner, their dark kerchiefs tied in the sectarian manner with both ends hanging down their backs. A bent grey-haired old man in a long caftan hovered against the wall on the right, bowing devoutly, his head touching a time-worn silk rug on the floor. The atmosphere was familiar to Privalov from his childhood; there was the smell of benzoin, wax and wood-oil; the image-case, which contained icons by ancient masters with expensive gold and silver trimmings, took up the entire front wall. There were icons by old foreign painters, ancient Stroganov images, and the works of court iconographers. All these

treasures were brought to Bakhareva's prayer-room from the ransacked Privalov chapel after the death of Sergei Privalov's mother. In the surrounding darkness the image-lamps cast a weak, flickering light, illuminating the deep incrustations on the trimmings, the intricate dim ornaments of the settings, the embellishments of pearls and gems, and golden pendants and necklaces. Expensive altar-cloths with golden crosses and fine embroidery on the corners hung under some of the images; smoke curled from a silver thurible on a little table beside the lectern.

Marya Bakhareva's voice resounded in the chapel with those quaint intonations peculiar to sectarians; she recited through the nose, stretching the words and drawing out the "i". Turning round, Privalov glimpsed Nadine's familiar tall form, head wrapped in a large kerchief, arms folded sectarian fashion on her chest, standing behind the old women.

"By all means, come and pray with us more often," Marya Bakhareva said to Privalov as they stepped out of the chapel. "Half of the images here are yours, but I shan't return them to you just for the present."

"Why not?" Privalov asked idly.

"Oh, what would you do with them? You're a bachelor, and have no one to look after them at home. What's more, you're not one to pray. I have image-lamps burning all the time, and old women reciting canons."

"Yes, they're better off here," Privalov agreed.

"What d'you mean?"

"Oh, the way they are now. I don't need them," Privalov explained.

"Now you're going too far," Bakhareva remarked gravely. "D'you realize what you're saying? They're your family icons. Your ancestors prayed to them. You young people think you're clever—pride's gotten the better of you."

"You didn't understand what Sergei meant," Nadine intervened.

"Leave that to me, my dear. I may fail to grasp other things, old and stupid as I am, but this is something I understand perfectly," her mother declared firmly.

The old woman's anger was rising, and it took all Nadine could do to compose her. The unexpected explosion took Privalov by surprise, and he was somewhat embarrassed.

"D'you know why Mother was angry?" Nadine asked him later.

"For my lack of sectarian zeal, I suppose," he replied.

"No, not that at all," Nadine explained. "It was because you weren't enough of a Privalov. D'you understand?"

"No, not quite."

Nadine chuckled, and looked at Privalov provocatively, meaningfully. Her words rang for long in his ears. He turned them over in his mind, pleased with the unexpected support he had received from her. She was on his side; a spiritual link was taking shape between them.

## XV

One day, when Privalov was at the Bakharevs', they spoke of old Pavla Kolpakova who lived in her ancient tumble-down family house near the Bakharev residence.

"Wouldn't you like to escort me to Kolpakova's?" Nadine suggested to Privalov, knowing how much this would vex her mother.

"Gladly," Privalov agreed, surprised by the suggestion; he saw Marya Bakhareva compress her lips disapprovingly as she gave them leave in her usual stately manner.

"Vera will come too, Mother," said Nadine, putting on her hat.

Vera was naturally game, and flushed with pleasure. "Making a fool of herself," Bakhareva thought of her elder daughter, seeing the happy young trio out of the house. "Wait till I tell Father!" Her angered thoughts were happily interrupted by a resounding kiss which Vera, with her usual exuberance, planted on her mother's cheek. Marya followed her merrily chatting departing daughters with her eyes. Vera was in high spirits. Everything Nadine did these days was an acme of achievement to her, a veritable science. It occurred to her that Nadine had a flair for doing things simply and well—her hat always becomingly pert, though it cost only five rubles, and her dresses always a perfect fit. Vera was unconscious of the fact that she idealized her sister simply because she thought that Nadine had become a bride.

"It's a five-minute walk from here," Nadine was saying as they stepped out of the gates. "First left, then down to the river, and around the corner."

Kolpakova's house was neglected, old and dilapidated. It was designed after the taste of the landed gentry, a style popular in the good old days of Alexander I. The façade boasted columns and a mezzanine floor, the gates were shaped as an *arc de triomphe*, the drive was magnificent, and there was a spacious yard and dozens of useless service buildings and outhouses, among them a hot-house for growing pineapples, stables for twenty-five horses, and a string of diverse structures whose purpose was now hard to divine. In his day Kolpakov had been one of the wealthiest gold-miners; he liked to indulge his uninhibited, expansive Russian nature, but was soon ruined and died in poverty, survived by a penniless wife, Pavla, and a daughter, Katya. Privalov was deeply shaken; he wondered where Pavla Kolpakova and Katya found a tenable spot under the corroded green tin roof, large sheets of which had become loose, wooden rafters

showing from under them. The moulded cornices and the heads of the Corinthian columns had long since collapsed, the stucco had peeled off, the carved balusters of the balcony had fallen out like rotten teeth, the windows in the second and mezzanine floors gaped glassless, and the window-frames looked like gouged eyes.

"Where does Pavla Kolpakova live?" Privalov asked as they approached the warped wicket, whose panel was firmly imbedded in the earth, leaving the entrance perpetually open.

"Oh, downstairs, in the corner room," Nadine replied.

They skirted the house, descended a few rickety stairs and found themselves in complete darkness, the smell of decay and dampness enveloping them. Vera ran in advance and flung open a heavy door into a low-ceilinged room with dusty little windows.

"It's us! May we come in?" Vera asked, stopping in the doorway.

"Yes, of course," a hollow feminine voice replied, and a small woman in round silver spectacles rose from an oil-cloth armchair by the window. "It's you, Vera, isn't it?"

Catching sight of Privalov, the woman hastily patted the faded chenille shawl on her shoulders and straightened herself, as though pricked with a pin.

"You don't recognize me, do you?" Privalov asked after Nadine greeted the old woman. "I'm Sergei Privalov."

"Sergei!" Pavla Kolpakova exclaimed, clasping her withered, wrinkled hands. "Where'd you come from? Remember, when you were boys, you and Konstantin used to come to me. Well, come in, come in, and sit down."

"Please don't bother. Don't regard us as guests—just old acquaintances," Nadine was saying.

"Fine, fine," the old woman whispered, casting a side-long glance at Privalov; her faded dark eyes looked at

him inoffensively but with frank curiosity, while her dry blue lips mumbled: "Fine, fine."

"Nadine has come to show off her suitor," she thought cheerfully to herself, slipping out like a mouse into a dark cubby-hole, where the samovar cover soon began to rattle.

Privalov looked round the oddly furnished room. An old-fashioned rosewood writing-desk stood before a settee upholstered in faded velvet; a painting of bathing nymphs hung over the settee; a silver birch dresser between the windows seemed to be leaning against the wall, and a broken mirror was propped up in the corner on a plain, unpainted pine stool; another sumptuous dressing table with a broken leg was lashed to the wall with dusty ribbons, graced by an old-fashioned candlestick and several carved wooden cupids. All these remnants of one-time luxury were covered with a layer of dust, as in a curiosity shop. An old Chinese tom-cat clambered out from under the dresser, looked dispassionately at the guests, and retired to the cubby-hole in which Kolpakova was making tea.

"Thank God! Thank God, you've come at last!" Pavla Kolpakova was saying, smiling broadly at Privalov. "Your house is coming to grief. It wants loving care. I know it, I know it from my own experience, dear boy. My house, as you see, is in ruins."

"Why should she be so happy to see me?" Privalov wondered, his heart going out to the kind old soul, of whom he had no more than a foggy recollection.

They had fun at tea. The ancient round-bellied cups, the sugar-basin shaped like a ram with a broken horn, the tall, blown-up Saxony tea-pot, and the low faceted flat-bottomed glass—all had an air of antiquity about them, and all looked unusually cosy. Vera chattered like a bird, teased the cat and ended up by choking on a

piece of cake. The incident somewhat alarmed old Kolpakova, and, shaking her grey head, she said:

"You've made it a real celebration! It's taken twenty years off me. You were tiny little tots only yesterday, and now—here I am, looking at you, thinking that I was young myself so very, very recently. How time flies!"

Intentionally or not, Pavla Kolpakova took Vera off to the kitchen garden where she meant to show her an unusual kind of cabbage. Privalov and Nadine remained alone. The girl guessed Kolpakova's innocent little manoeuvre, designed to give the "bride and groom" a few minutes all their own.

"How wretched she looks," Privalov observed.

"Why wretched? No, not that—only at first glance. She's a dyed-in-the-wool philosopher. Speak to her some day and see," Nadine protested.

"What is her philosophy?"

"Well, how shall I put it? She had her own very special views on life and happiness. Look how well preserved she is for her age, and yet she's been through so much. Mind, she never asked for help. She's very proud, though she may look simple."

"What does she live on?"

"She weaves lace and knits stockings," Nadine said, and added, "She's good to people. That's a fortune in its own right. I mean, having such warm feelings at her age, and rising above her circumstances. In her place anyone else would have lost his head—grown bitter. If she had not been reared for a life of wealth and idleness, she would have done a lot of good to herself and to others."

The conversation was interrupted by the return of Pavla Kolpakova and Vera. Tea was over and nothing remained but to depart. In the yard they met a tall, bent old man with yellow hair.

"Insane," Nadine warned Privalov, who offered her his arm.



The old man looked at the youthful trio with narrowed eyes and, dragging his feet in their shabby boots, approached Privalov.

"Here are the documents," the madman said hoarsely, handing him a stack of soiled papers. They were folded neatly and tied with a pink ribbon.

"What are they?" Privalov asked, staring at the package.

"All my fortune is in them—all my rights," the old man repeated several times with a smile, untying the pink ribbon with shaking hands. "They robbed me—took everything I had. But I have my rights and will get everything back. You'll see. Look at the papers. The case is clear as daylight. I've waited a long time, but what else could I do?"

The package contained an assortment of rubbish: theatre posters, valueless vouchers, advertisements and even motley calico and medicine labels. Privalov scrutinized the "rights" attentively and said, handing back the papers to the old man:

"Yes, you won't have much longer to wait."

The old man asked, "D'you think I'll get my property back?"

There was such tense expectancy in the man's face that it roused Privalov's pity. Vera giggled noiselessly, hiding behind Pavla Kolpakova's back.

"I'm sure you will," Nadine asserted. "You've waited so long. It won't be long now."

"Oh, thank you, thank you ever so much," the old man whispered, kissing her hand quickly. "Your husband's a clever man. Yes, I'll wait."

Vera could contain her laughter no longer and ran off ahead.

## XVI

Life in the provinces rests entirely upon mutual visits. It is a gamma of its kind, which goes into the making of all sorts of musical combinations. Victor Bakharev and Nicolas Veryovkin were the first to call on Privalov. Victor came on his father's behalf, dressed in a tail-coat, white tie, white gloves and a fancy silk top-hat with narrow edges and a straight crown. Nicolas Veryovkin, the local lawyer, Agrippina's first-born, was his very opposite. Tall, portly, with a powerful red neck and a huge barrel-like head capped with soft blond locks, he looked, in the words of a local wit, much like a respectable bandit. His was a striking visage: bulging, fish-like, unblinking grey eyes, fat, meaty lips, prominent cheek-bones, a narrow forehead, thick merging eyebrows, and, to top it all, a complexion all his own, copper-red and oily. It spoke for itself. Add to this that the local lowyer was entirely too sparing with his smile, and that his face was handsome in its own way, owing to an indefinable mixture of insolence, irony and humour, all of which distinguished him from thousands of plainer-looking people. There was something unique even about the commonplaces which Nicolas Veryovkin uttered with an unsmiling, earnest countenance. Should someone else have spoken them, they would have sounded silly and absurd, but in Nicolas Veryovkin's case they passed muster as the real thing. He was a favourite in both male and female company, standing out like a thoroughbred among all the colourless, ordinary people.

"See whom I've brought," Victor shouted loudly in the reception-room.

"I'm very glad to see you," Privalov uttered, shaking the huge paw of his one-time University acquaintance.

"Hope we'll get along," Veryovkin replied in his pleasant throaty baritone.

Victor instantly made a detailed inspection of Privalov's domicile and said aloud to no one in particular:

"That's Khina for you! She's made an excellent job of it. Remember, Nicolas, how Lomtev and your father, Ivan Veryovkin, fleeced the gold-miners at cards in these very rooms? Ha-ha. They had them down to their last kopek."

"You've come to Uzel at the right time," Veryovkin said, sinking heavily into one of the armchairs, which groaned pitifully under his astounding weight. He examined the room closely from his seat, as though looking for something he had expected to find there, and added, "I'm thirsty."

"Aye! I've a horrid headache myself after last night," Victor chimed in. "Nicolas, d'you want vodka? As for me, I want jerez. Oh, hang on, Privalov, I'll see to it myself! Won't be a minute!"

He vanished instantly, slipping into Khiona Zaplatina's half of the house, and returned with Ipat, who was weighed down with bottles and plates of *hors d'oeuvres*: Khiona had seen Victor arrive and had everything ready when he appeared with his request for vodka and sherry.

"Tell the mistress," Victor Bakharev yelled in Ipat's wake, "tell her, we'll stay for dinner. Understand?"

"Gluttony is getting the better of me," Veryovkin announced, swallowing his vodka with the mannerisms of a confirmed drunkard.

A few minutes later Privalov had the privilege of learning the latest local news. Victor talked his head off, though obviously he began losing his form after his fifth glass of jerez.

"I liked you from the first, Privalov," he kept saying with sparkling eyes. "I don't give a damn for all your millions. It isn't the money that matters. Ha, ha! I'd have been a millionaire myself if I had wanted to. Imagine how everybody would fuss round me then. Ha, ha! 'Victor Bakharev, Victor Bakharev!' I'd show them all how

little I care for them. Yes. But we'll introduce you to some petticoats. Your mouth will water at the sight of them, you'll see! Who d'you like best: girls or women? As for me, I prefer widows. Girls are such a waste of time. Oh, by the way, Nicolas has a sister, Alla—a girl with a spark in her. And at the Lyakhovskys' they'll show you a wench worth everything you have—wallet, shirt and all. She's beauty, fire, grace, and mischief all rolled into one."

"Zosya Lyakhovskaya is indeed a savoury piece," Veryovkin confirmed, biting into a slice of cured fish.

"She almost kissed me once," Bakharev announced.

"That's a lie," Veryovkin remarked. "I remember her throwing you out. As for kissing you, she'd have to be mad to do it."

"Ah! But she did," young Bakharev came back. "It was this way: Zosya likes a laugh, and I showed her how dogs catch flies. A Tashkent officer had taught me. Have you ever seen a dog basking in the sun? It sort of dozes." (And Victor demonstrated how a dog dozed in the sun.) "Then a fly comes buzzing: 'Zh-zh-zh.' The dog opens one eye, then the other, squints, then snaps suddenly 'kham!'" (The young man enacted the scene with remarkable talent.) "I showed the thing to Zosya and she wanted me to teach her—and I did. Now she catches flies better than I! Ask her some day, she'll show you. That's when she almost kissed me."

"Probably took you for a real dog," Veryovkin put in.

"Think you're funny, don't you?" Bakharev grunted. "I'm wasting my time with you two. I'll go and look up Khina."

Staggering slightly, his lips twisted into the absent-minded grin of a habitual drunk, Bakharev left the room. His parting words, muttered under his breath, reached Privalov's ears: "I've come to like Privalov! Honest to God! There's something in his face. . . . Ah, hell."

Just the two of them, Privalov and Veryovkin, remained in the room. Privalov puffed pensively at a cigar. Veryovkin tossed down porter in large, lusty gulps.

"Come to stay?" he asked.

"Yes, I reckon on settling down," Privalov replied.

Veryovkin grunted and took another swallow from his glass. Looking Privalov in the eye, he inquired:

"Seen Bakharev?"

"Yes."

"Hm—you see, Sergei Alexandrovich, I came to you on business," Veryovkin began, "but first may I ask you—have you spoken about me? I mean, has old Bakharev mentioned me to you?"

"No, he hasn't," Privalov replied, wondering what it was all about.

"Hm," Veryovkin grunted and drummed with his fingers impatiently on the table-cloth. "Well, you see, Sergei Alexandrovich, I'll speak to you as an old University friend. Hm—to cut a long story short, you've probably noticed that I've gone to seed."

Taken unawares by this frank confession, Privalov only shrugged his shoulders and muttered something unintelligible.

"A bird's judged by its flight. I've gone to seed, and no mistake." Veryovkin accompanied his words with several vigorous tosses of his huge head, as though trying to shake something off. "People see it, and I see it myself. Can't hide a cat in a bag. I've been a lawyer eight years. My annual budget is ten to twelve thousand, and I'm up to my neck in debt. I have a bit of a reputation for small cases. You'll hear about it. But I'm telling you this, so you won't be in the dark. To make it short, I've come to grief. I got wind of your case, about the inheritance, and come to offer my services. For my part, I can only say that I'd gladly tackle just that kind of an involved case. You do need a solicitor, don't you?"

"Indeed. Well, why not? I accept your offer," Privalov replied. "Gladly."

"Well, it isn't much of a find for you," Veryovkin rejoined. "You first ask Konstantin what he thinks of the idea, and I'll wait. The case is big, and you don't know me at all. In the meantime, I'll acquaint you with some of the people we'll have to deal with. One of your trustees, Polovodov, is my brother-in-law, but that's nothing. We'll get after him. Know the old Russian saying? Share the bread, but see to your own tobacco."

The conversation was interrupted by Bakharev, whom somebody shoved in through the door. He stared stupidly at Privalov, rolled his head and said thickly:

"Damn it! I've come out of the very depths of the boarding-school. That is, I was extracted from there. Khi-ona has a pretty wench hidden away there—eyes like butter and caviare. But the fists of the heavenly creature! I wanted to get down to a bit of geography with her—and she boxed me one."

Privalov and Veryovkin laughed, while Bakharev, rolling his head, staggered over to the settee and lay down. Making an effort to rise on his elbows, he said:

"Listen, Privalov—I love you—and—you don't know a thing—n-no."

"What Sergei Alexandrovich does know is that you need some sleep," Veryovkin observed.

"N-n-no. You may think I'm a drunken fool, a clown. But hear what I have to say, Privalov." Bakharev sat up, looking round the room vacantly.

"Mother likes you. She likes you very much. She's a fine old lady, and there's more brains in her little finger than in all of Veryovkin's big head! Ha, ha! And d'you know what Mother fears most? She fears you might marry Zosya. On my word! Nadine is a fine girl. On my word! She may be my sister, but I'll say it just the same—a fine girl, and clever. If she hadn't been my sister, I'd

never let you have her. Marry her, Privalov, d'you hear? You'll be grateful eventually. Mother's afraid Zosya will snatch you away. Ha, ha! Zosya almost kissed me!"

"Well, that's enough, young man," Veryovkin said, "sleep."

Privalov blushed. Young Bakharev's words had been most unpleasant; not because of what Victor had said about Marya Stepanovna, but rather because the name of the girl he loved was mentioned in Veryovkin's presence. The lawyer was liable to get a false impression.

"Excellent chap, our Victor, but he talks bosh when he's high," Veryovkin said, pretending that he did not notice Privalov's embarrassment. "He lies like a drunken hag. Yet he only repeated what the whole town's talking about." After a pause Veryovkin added, "Take the advice of a wise old owl: never pay attention to what people say behind your back. It's the scourge of the provinces—particularly our province. That's easily explained. We men at least play cards. But there's nothing for the ladies to do. But that's *apropos*—ladies aren't my province."

Bakharev was snoring loudly, stretched out on the settee. Privalov, relieved, looked gratefully at his visitor.

"As for me," he said, "it doesn't mean anything to me, but he mentioned the girl, and Marya Stepanovna. And it may cast a shadow on them."

"Oh, put it out of your mind. Let's rather talk business. Victor, are you asleep? Fine."

Veryovkin gave to understand that he was familiar with Privalov's case to the minutest detail and hinted in passing that there was something behind the disappearance of Tit Privalov which the trustees might utilize to their own ends.

"What exactly do you mean?" Privalov asked.

"Nothing as yet," Veryovkin replied noncommittally, "but I do have a lead. You see, the whole mess is only

just going to explode. Whatever went before was mere child's play."

"But what can there be?" Privalov wondered.

"We'll speak about it some other time, Sergei Alexandrovich. I must leave you now. I have a case coming up in court," Veryovkin said apologetically, glancing at his gold watch. "An hour from now I shall have to defend a character who killed three men. You must excuse me. Call on me one of these days, and we'll chat about it. Victor, my boy, get up!"

"Let him be," Privalov intervened. "He isn't in the way. Let him sleep."

"Don't trouble yourself too much with him. Well, I'll expect you, Sergei Alexandrovich. Drop in. And think about my proposal."

Veryovkin's proposal and Victor's drunken monologue occupied Privalov's thoughts. What were Veryovkin's suspicions about the inheritance? It was unlikely that he spoke through his hat. There was scarcely reason to think Nicolas Veryovkin would make insinuations of that kind merely to have Privalov think more highly of him. Firstly, Privalov always esteemed Veryovkin since their University days, and secondly, the latter was too clever to use such a crude approach. Furthermore, what he had said about himself showed that he meant to deal squarely. There had been just one thing in their conversation which Privalov did not like, and that was Veryovkin's transparent hint at Privalov's dependence upon Konstantin.

"Why did he say that?" Privalov thought, pacing up and down his study, casting sidelong glances at the snoring Victor. "Konstantin can have his own opinion, and I can have mine."

Deep in his heart Privalov was angry that he had given himself away when Victor was making his idiotic speech. Veryovkin had surely noticed his reaction, though he had pretended that he had not. "What made the idiot



speak?" Privalov mused, casting an annoyed glance at his sleeping guest. Victor lay on his back in a most uninhibited fashion, arms flung above his head, one leg hanging down from the settee; his young face looked enviably healthy, and a happy smile played on his lips. There was something in his face reminiscent of Nadine. He had the same white, bulging forehead, the same eyebrows, the same cut of the eyes, and the same long dark eyelashes. But in her they were all delightfully, girlishly pure and delicate; the frank glance of her grey eyes mirrored her soul, as it were. Yet Victor, her brother, had made free with her name in an utterly shameless way. Nadine had indeed made a big impression upon Privalov from the first. Had he probed deeper into what he felt about her, he would have recognized that it was built upon a fairly complex set of boyhood recollections; he still saw the girl as through a prism, the prism of his childhood. She was intimately associated with all the sentiment he had for her family. She was Vasily Bakharev's daughter. She was Marya Bakhareva's flesh and blood. His imagination could not detach the girl from the environment in which he had seen her. The house, the cosy rooms, the old-fashioned furniture, the flowers, the servants, the very air—were all dear to his heart, and against their setting Nadine was not just any girl, but the consummation of a long, long story which involved many events and many people he loved.

At the same time, for some reason, Privalov shunned the thought that Nadine could be his wife. No, haste in a matter of that kind was out of the question. A wife was something different; all he wanted just then was to see her the way she was. A wife was much too coarse a word for what he wanted to see in Nadine. He revered her for the best that was in her. She could be the wife of someone else, and he would feel the same about her. Strange as it may seem, the thought of her added something indefinably

new to his coveted ambitions and plans. Before, they had all been pure reason. But now. . . . Indeed, Nadine's presence lent them purpose. It lent them the warmth they had previously lacked. Brooding over them here, in Uzel, he discovered many new aspects which before he had not even suspected. Often, he had doubted his plans. There was a vague, pernicious foreboding of failure. Now he had only to think of her and all doubts dispersed. They gave way to that happy condition in which vigour, energy and strength seemed to predominate.

## XVII

"He's going out!" Matryona whispered hoarsely to Khiona Zaplatina. "I saw him with my own eyes. He's putting on his coat."

Zaplatina ran to the window. Her heart beat wildly in her withered breast. She wondered which way Privalov would go. If he would go right along Nagornaya Street, it would mean he was going to the Lyakhovskys'; if straight, along Uspensky Boulevard, it was the Polovodovs'. Just then Ipat emerged and hailed a cab. He was followed by Privalov, who hesitated and looked to the right.

"Nagornaya Street—left," he said to the cabman.

His words struck Khiona Zaplatina like a thunderclap. She shivered. Her game was lost. It was all over. Privalov was on his way to propose to Nadine.

While Zaplatina was still trying to recover her self-control, Privalov was stepping across the threshold to Marya Bakhareva's chambers. He met Vera, who, caught unawares in a simple calico dress, was greatly embarrassed.

"May I see your mother?" Privalov asked, bowing to her.

"She's in the chapel."

"What a fine girl," thought Privalov, admiring her. At that instant he regretted having been inattentive to her all this time, and felt that he wanted to make up for it. "I wanted to talk to your mother before I went to the Lyakhovskys'," he explained.

Vera flushed, glanced at him strangely, childishly, and murmured:

"Nadine used to go to the Lyakhovskys."

"And you?" Privalov inquired.

"Mother wouldn't let me. Always so many people there, so many men. Ah, but here's Mother."

"So you've come at last," Marya Bakhareva exclaimed cheerfully from the doorway. "Well, well, God bless you."

"I've come to see you before going to the Lyakhovskys, to screw up my nerve," Privalov replied.

"Have you been in to see the old man? He'll take it ill if you haven't, you know. He was wondering just the other day why you hadn't been coming round. It's been almost a week, hasn't it?" Bakhareva said.

"I didn't want to impose."

"Oh, how silly of you. Vasily isn't well. It's his leg," the old woman stated.

They chatted for about a quarter of an hour, and yet Privalov would not go, hoping to hear the familiar rustle of Nadine's dress in the adjoining room. He even looked round several times. His furtive looks did not escape Marya Bakhareva, though she pretended to see nothing. Privalov was tormented by a desire to see the young woman. She had not left her room on several occasions before, but this time he was gripped by a kind of pained, sad expectancy, tortured by the thought that she was avoiding him. After Victor's monologue he simply had to see Nadine, to hear her voice, to feel her close to him. He had been intentionally putting off his visit to the Bakharevs' day after day. Marya Bakhareva, mean-

while, did not, it seemed, take notice of her guest's mood, speaking of innocent little trifles and paying no heed to Privalov's distraught replies. Vera stuck her head into the door several times, looked askance at the visitor, and evinced surprise that he was still there.

"Nadine's gone," Marya Bakhareva told Privalov in parting.

"To the Shatrov Mills, visiting Konstantin," she added, noting Privalov's fixed, stupid stare. "D'you know Sarayev, the doctor?"

"Yes, I remember him faintly," Privalov replied.

"Well, she's gone with him."

"Gone, gone, gone"—the words drummed in his head. He parted from Marya Bakhareva in a fog and, in a fog, walked to the hall; then he suddenly remembered that he still had to see Vasily Bakharev.

Bakharev was in high spirits and greeted Privalov cheerfully. Even the ailment which had kept him in his study a whole month seemed to amuse him; he called it his worm in the apple. Privalov was greatly relieved, as though a mountain had been lifted from his shoulders. The depression of a minute ago vanished into thin air, and he laughed heartily at the old man's funny stories from his busy, eventful life.

"Well, Sergei," Bakharev boomed, slapping Privalov's shoulder, "it's three weeks since you've come to Uzel. Have you taken your bearings? I'd like to know what you're up to. You're young. All roads are open to you. A splendid chap like you shouldn't let the grass grow under his feet."

The question caught Privalov unawares. He scarcely knew what to say, but Bakharev continued:

"I know, I know what you're going to say. You'll say, 'I need time to look round.' That's what you'll say, isn't it? People are cautious these days. We were different. Came hell, came high water—it was all the same to us.

And everything turned out well—we're alive, and never went hungry. But here's what I want to tell you: you've been three weeks in Uzel, and if you're here another ten years you'll never see anything new. It's just the same old merry-go-round, day in and day out. You have made up your mind to stay here, haven't you?"

"Yes, I have," Privalov replied.

"Splendid. You'll take over the mills, I suppose. That's fine—a master's eye is good for a business."

"No. The mills may not even be mine. It's too early to speak about them," Privalov rejoined.

"True enough," Bakharev agreed. "A stack isn't hay and a debt isn't money. But I still want to know what you think of the mills."

"You insist on knowing, Vasily Nazarovich?" Privalov asked, looking the old man straight in the eyes.

"Yes, I insist."

After a brief pause Privalov explained that he did not like the iron and steel business and thought it was an artificially developed branch of industry. He was not going to turn his back upon the mills, however, because, firstly, they were family property, and, secondly, because the fate of forty thousand people and the future of a million acres of Ural land was tied up with them. Privalov said he had no views on the profits that might be coming in from the mills, and intended to use them to pay the debts and gradually raise production. Bakharev heard out his frank confession with head slightly cocked to one side. When Privalov ended he embraced and kissed him with tears in his eyes. Sighing deeply, he said with a catch in his voice:

"Thank you, Sergei, for being frank with me. I'll die content now. Yes, dear boy, you've put my mind at rest. Thank you."

"I'm only going to do what I must," Privalov remarked, deeply touched. "Being the heir, I must pay the

state whatever is owed by the mills, and then tackle a far bigger debt."

"What bigger debt?"

"Why, my debt to those whose labour went into making the mills."

"Who do you mean? The mills were built by your forefathers. Then Gulyayev took care of them. That means the labour was theirs."

"That's true, but the owners have already been rewarded a hundredfold for all their troubles. You forget the Bashkirs, upon whose land they built, and you forget the adscript serfs."

"Yes, but the Bashkirs sold their land."

"For two and a half rubles in notes and three pounds of brick tea," Privalov retorted.

"What of it? That was their business. It's no concern of ours."

"But it *is* our concern. What would you call a sale of that kind if it were made today? I don't want to cast a slur on my forefathers, but..."

"Do you mean you want to give the land back to the Bashkirs? But they'd have sold it to someone else if your own forefathers hadn't taken it. Have you thought of that? And if now you give it back to them, they'll sell it the next day just the same. No, Sergei, you mustn't do it."

"No, and I don't intend to. I'll keep the land, at least for the time being, but there are other ways of squaring accounts with the Bashkirs."

"I don't follow you."

"If I should give the land back to the Bashkirs, I wouldn't have anything to pay the workers with, the workers who were in the mills for the past hundred and fifty years. I don't want to leave any of them in the lurch, and must put the mills on a paying basis. Then I'll gradually settle accounts with all my historical creditors. I

don't know yet how I'll do it, but there's one thing I can say now: I shan't take a single kopek for myself."

"Ah, Sergei, Sergei," Bakharev whispered, shaking his head. "You've a kind soul, a golden heart. It's the blood in your veins. But all I can say is that you're starting a difficult, unheard-of thing. Take me—I'm an old man, yet I can't quite grasp it."

"Well, we'll talk about it again some day."

"Yes, yes, of course. And if you really mean to do what you say, you'll square a good many injustices. So the mills will go their way, but what about you, what are you going to do with yourself? You're young and strong—all roads are open to you. You're not an old man, like me, with death stalking me, whatever I may have on my mind. If I were you, I'd follow your father's suit and go to the Sayans. There's freedom in the gold-mines, and I'd show you a dozen likely places. You'd always think well of me. Konstantin didn't want them, so let them be yours."

Privalov smiled.

"I'm in dead earnest, Sergei. Why waste your time in Uzel? Well, is it a bargain? Konstantin will take care of the mills, and you and I will go to the gold-mines. As soon as my leg gets better."

"No, I shall never be a gold-miner," Privalov stated firmly. "You must excuse me, I don't want to offend you, but it is my duty to keep a grip on the mills, while I have no such obligations concerning the gold-mines."

Bakharev looked at Privalov with dimmed eyes, raised his fingers to his forehead and smiled wryly.

"Well, what d'you expect to do here?" he asked testily.

"I intend to start in the wheat trade," Privalov replied.

The old man shifted heavily in his armchair and looked with fright at his visitor.

"Did I hear you right?" he mumbled.

"You did. I really do think of starting in the wheat trade," Privalov said.

"You? The wheat trade? Selling *flour*?" Bakharev gasped.

"Yes, flour, among other things," Privalov replied, a forced smile on his lips, his head reeling dizzily. "I'd like to explain why."

Bakharev rubbed his forehead and uttered hastily:

"No. Don't! I understand—I understand if I'm able to understand anything at all."

Leaning back, raising his hands to his face, the old man mumbled as in a trance:

"Selling flour—*flour*! *Privalov* selling *flour*—*Vasily Bakharev* buying *flour* from *Sergei Privalov*."



# **PART** TWO



**H**ER UNSETTLED affairs left much free time on Khiona Zaplatina's hands and she dedicated it all to Agrippina Veryovkina, that unfailing old friend. Animated discussions took place in Veryovkina's sumptuous boudoir or, more frequently, in her no less luxurious bedroom. The two ladies made bold deductions and hatched ambitious plots. They were like two battle-scarred generals, holding secret conferences on the eve of battle. They argued. They worked themselves into a frenzy. They lost their tempers. But they always made peace on the thought that all men were positive fools, fools who like all incurables were deeply convinced of their own genius.

"Oh, if you had only seen it," Khiona Zaplatina whispered, rolling her eyes. "There's a limit to everything. I can't bear going to the Bakharevs! Nadine makes eyes at Privalov, and her parents wait on him! All their high airs are gone! Old Vasily is ready to run errands for Privalov! I give you my word! And Marya makes shady propositions! As though I'd ever agree to eavesdrop on my lodger!"

"But you did take him in," Agrippina said significantly.

"Take him in? Why don't you ask what it cost me, my dear? Yes. I wouldn't hear of it at first, but Marya kept harping on it: 'Please, Khiona! Dear, dear Khiona! We'll all feel secure if Privalov stays with you.' You know me—I couldn't refuse. Now I've put a noose round my own neck—expenses, worries, troubles—and more to come."

"You say Privalov isn't the type ladies like?" Agrippina asked pensively for the second time.

"He is not," Khiona replied flatly. "He lacks—how shall I put it, just between us—he lacks audacity, the kind of audacity women like. Everything depends on

knowing how to utilize the right moment, on taking advantage of the situation; as for Privalov, I doubt if he'll have success."

"Privalov has a fortune," Agrippina picked up where her friend left off.

"That's all he has—just his millions."

"Quite enough, I'd say."

"Indeed, but a fortune doesn't make a woman love a man. Love—passion—you don't buy that for money. No question of it, the Bakharevs and Lyakhovskys will pursue him—both Nadine and Zosya, but. . . . Really, I don't know what men find in that saucy Zosya. Tell me, for heaven's sake, tell me what do men find in her? She's small, lean, tow-headed. It's a wonder!"

Agrippina Veryovkina had a somewhat different opinion of Zosya's attractions, though she did find her eccentric. A certain amount of originality was, indeed, an asset in a woman, but it was a slippery path which could easily lead from the sublime to the ridiculous.

In spite of her forty-eight years Agrippina Veryovkina looked young, discreetly plump and possessed truly aristocratic manners. There was something very imposing about her, particularly when she smiled in her patronizing way. Her blonde hair, her eyes of an undefinable colour, and her full, fresh lips added to her beauty. It would never enter anyone's head that she could be the mother of a dozen children. Looking at this matron in her prime one would never think that her life was filled with so many trials and tribulations.

A long time ago Agrippina Veryovkina and Khiona Zaplatina had been at the same Moscow boarding-school, which made three demands upon its fledglings: French, French and French. Of Russianized German stock from Riga, Agrippina Veryovkina had a happy disposition; this, it seems, was all she inherited from her parents, apart from six sisters and a brother. At the boarding-school, Agrip-

pina and Khiona, to use the school jargon, "adored" each other. We already know Khiona's life-story. Agrippina, on the other hand, married directly on leaving school. Her husband, Ivan Veryovkin, was one of those young men who, thanks partly to his aristocratic descent and partly to his powerful patrons, was regarded as possessing "a brilliant future." But things never went beyond this. He made no career at all, though he tried his hand at a dozen different occupations. Every year Agrippina presented her husband with either a girl or boy. The result was deplorable; the family grew and flourished, while Ivan Veryovkin's "brilliant future" and Agrippina's French were totally inadequate to provide for it. There was one happy circumstance, however, which gave a hand up to Agrippina, and for that matter to the entire bouquet of her Riga sisters. One of the sisters, in fact, had the rare good fortune of marrying a decrepit but extremely important individual. Soon after this auspicious event, that is, soon after Gertrude Spiegel became Mrs. Korobyin-Unkovskaya, the other Riga sisters entered into circulation with extraordinary speed and were married off to an assortment of small-fry officials. Just then the State Bank opened its branch in Uzel, and the husbands of two of the sisters were forthwith installed as its directors. These two had the other four sisters move from Riga to Uzel, one of the latter marrying the director of a local school, the other a doctor, the third a mechanic, and the fourth, who spurned matrimonial ties in view of her advanced age, being appointed headmistress of the Uzel girls' school. To cut a long story short, the Spiegel sisters conquered the town in extremely short shift, and began to multiply with astounding vigour.

Ivan Veryovkin was also employed at the bank in an uncertain capacity and with a fat salary. But his "brilliant future" failed to materialize in spite of his important kinsman. On settling in Uzel he soon gave up all

thought of work and entered cheerfully upon the slippery path of a gambler. He showed no interest whatsoever in the affairs of his family, letting them run their own course. He was hardly ever at home and led a typically nomadic life, visiting fairs, clubs, gambling-houses, and similar dens. True, in his blacker days, after a big loss or a scandal, he would reappear at the family hearth and act the modest family man and loving father with rare patience. On such occasions he was unusually nice to his wife, coddled his children, but at the first opportunity plunged back into his favourite element.

There is the question of the ten thousand rubles spent annually by Agrippina Veryovkina. But it is a delicate question usually left well enough alone. Simply, Agrippina "lived on her debts," as people said, which merely meant that she owed so much to so many that her creditors, rather than lose all, gave her a helping hand. But even this indubitably shrewd *modus vivendi* would have come to a natural and rapid end if, on the one hand, Agrippina had not had her eldest daughter marry Polovodov, director of the Uzel-Mokhov Bank, and, on the other, her first-born had not been one of the best Uzel lawyers. These two factors visibly augmented Agrippina's funds, and with a clear conscience she held her elegant Thursday *soirées*, at which the French language predominated, each noteworthy event was duly reviewed, and visiting actors and actresses given a chance to display their talent.

Thus, notwithstanding the fact that Agrippina's existence was subject to all the winds, storms and hurricanes of life, the worthy lady produced into the world a full dozen little ones. This living ladder, which started on Nicolas, who is already known to us, ascended rung by rung, via various Andrés, Woldemars, Ninis, and Bébés, and culminated in the six-month-old Vadim. The children were quartered in a corridor partitioned by

means of gauzy screens into a number of separate premises. This aristocratic offspring had a decided list towards the male sex. The two eldest boys attended the classical Gymnasium, one attended a military school, another a technical, or real, school, etc., etc. In the near future the Veryovkin ant-heap made promise of endowing its fatherland with tireless personages of distinction in diverse fields of endeavour. We have already made mention of Agrippina's eldest daughter, who was married to Polovodov. Her closest successor in age, Alla, had entered upon that flowering period when she could no longer be kept in the depths of the ant-heap and had to be transferred to *maman's* bedroom in the capacity of a full-grown young woman. Clearly, Alla could not after that treat the denizens of the ant-heap with anything but the profoundest disdain. Whenever she happened to be traversing its precincts she lifted her impeccably ironed starched petticoats with her dainty fingers, and even held her nose.

Nicolas Veryovkin's first impressions of this world were not particularly enviable. But that did not prevent him from being an exception, even a domestic deity, because Agrippina, his mother, had an insuperable weakness for her first-born, and built up something akin to a cult round his person. Whatever Nicolas happened to do was the acme of perfection; the very idea of criticism was scorned. When Nicolas was expelled from school for being involved in a scandal, Agrippina, true to her nature, did not reproach him with a single word and gathered what little funds she still had to send her darling to Petersburg. Nicolas fully justified her faith in him. He quickly found his bearings in the capital, passed his matriculation exams, and was graduated from the University a full-fledged jurist. Nicolas's letters, though not particularly exhaustive, were invariably witty and cheerful, and were treasured by his mother

as a reminder of that happy period. Incidentally, Agrippina even preserved the clipping of a newspaper advertisement in which a certain student, "undaunted by distance," offered his services as a private tutor. The *beaux mots* of the inimitable Nicolas made his proud mother laugh until the tears ran down her cheeks. Lack of fear of distances was a trait that pervaded all Nicolas's life, and particularly his professional activities. Agrippina never demanded anything of her deity, except that it should at all costs live with her under the same roof, under her loving, motherly care.

Second to Nicolas in Agrippina's heart was Alla. She was no beauty by any means with her irregular features; but in this growing, angular girl her mother sensed something highly promising and original. Alla had already acquired the wordly tact which begins with knowing when to make a timely departure and ends in manipulations so involved that no sage could ever unravel them. Khiona, of course, also expressed her delight in Alla, and never missed the opportunity to say:

*Elle est tellement innocente  
Qu'elle ne connait presque rien....*

"What does your brother do?" Khiona asked on several occasions.

"You mean Oscar? He's a hopeless fool, nothing more," Agrippina replied. "Came all the way from Petersburg to the Urals—and why? What would you think? Just to go *fishing*. Now, tell me, isn't that stupid?"

"Hm. Yes," Khiona grunted, "but it seems he has a fine position in Petersburg?"

"Yes, thanks to sister Gertrude. He gets about five thousand a year for doing nothing. So the idiot takes all my boys and spends days fishing with them."

"What a strange thing to do."



"Simply stupid, my dear."

"Isn't it funny that Oscar's arrival here coincided with Privalov's?" Khiona ventured.

"Oh, my dear, you've lost your mind with that Privalov. What connection can there be? My brother Oscar's just a simple fool. It's the usual story."

All these exchanges led to stereotyped evaluations of the "snob," Polovodov.

"He's your son-in-law," Khiona would say, throwing back her head, "but I'll always say he's a snob. Yes. Don't stand up for him, Agrippina. I happen to know that he looks down on you, too. Indeed. Just because he's a bank director and Privalov's trustee he seems to think he's head and shoulders above everybody else! Not all of us can be directors and trustees, can we?"

Since Privalov's arrival this tirade was supplemented with the following conclusion:

"Polovodov may be your son-in-law, Agrippina, but I'm terribly happy Privalov will deflate him a bit. Yes, very happy, indeed! Just don't stand up for him, dear."

"I'd never think of standing up for him."

"There's also Lyakhovsky. Grown rich on counterfeit banknotes and stolen gold, he thinks he's high and mighty and a kin to the devil. But the day will come when Privalov will get on his tail. He may look quiet, and I'm sure he'll have no success with the women, but he'll get at Polovodov and Lyakhovsky. You know, I heard poor Tit Privalov, Sergei's half-brother, was taken to Switzerland and pushed off a precipice. Whose handiwork could that be, d'you think?"

Agrippina would have nothing to say to this pointed question, and Khiona usually furnished her own explanation:

"Lyakhovsky's, of course! Plain as day. He'd stop at nothing!"

"I don't see what Lyakhovsky could get out of murdering the poor boy," Agrippina said. "Nicolas says the trustees would rather have Tit Privalov on hand, lest they apportion the inheritance and end with the trusteeship."

"Nonsense, nonsense," Khiona said, "I know it's Lyakhovsky's handiwork. Nicolas is fooling you. I know, *mon ange*, why Nicolas called on Privalov."

"You know, Khiona, that I never meddle in my son's affairs. That's my principle."

"And yet I know—and I want Nicolas to take both Privalov and the trustees in hand," Khiona declared haughtily. "Let the Bakharevs be left holding the bag, admiring their Nadine, while we marry Privalov off to Alla. You'll see. We'll have to handle the affair carefully: first a little *tête-à-tête*, then a picnic, then something like a nervous stroke.... Men are all such fools! Soon as they see a woman their eyes search under her corset. We..."

"No, Khiona," Agrippina interrupted her haughtily. "I won't have you speak of my Alla as of some second-hand bride."

"Oh, I was only joking; yet I know what I say," Khiona declared.

## II

Privalov called on Veryovkin in the morning. A crowd of shabby muzhiks clustered round the lawyer's front-door. They took off their caps respectfully as he walked past them, and did not put them on again until the lackey answered his ring.

"We want to see the lawyer," a one-eyed muzhik said when the bald-headed lackey appeared in the doorway, craning his neck and pulling in his shoulders awkwardly.

"At home, sir," the lackey announced, leading Privalov to the carpeted stairway, which had exotic plants ranged along its sides. He slammed the door under the very noses of the muzhiks, grumbling: "Trying to crash in through the door, the bumpkins," and hastened somewhat ahead of Privalov.

While the lackey entered Veryovkin's study to announce him, Privalov waited in Agrippina Veryovkina's sumptuous guest-room. He looked idly at the attractive walnut furniture, the marble vases, the tasteful drapery on the doors and windows, the multi-coloured carpet beside the settee, the grand piano by the wall, and the paintings. Everything was in excellent taste. Each piece of furniture, each knick-knack was placed most advantageously, serving as background, supplement and explanation of all the other things in the room. Even the most penetrating eye would scarcely have spotted the fatal *question d'argent* that underlay all these artistic appointments. The wretched lie was most artfully cloaked by this lavish furniture, these soft carpets, which served as a setting for the cordial smiles and aristocratic manners of their mistress.

"Come in, please," Veryovkin's voice boomed from somewhere, and soon his bulky frame appeared, clad in a striped Tatar gown. "You'll have to excuse me," he apologized comically, taking Privalov by the elbow. "You've caught me flat-footed, I might say. I had to work on a little case, and it's kind of handier in the gown. Every time I put on my coat all thoughts leave my mind. I won't be a minute."

Veryovkin vanished behind a low Japanese screen, and soon Privalov heard a laboured wheezing, and then a funny snorting, emanating from that quarter, as though a herd of seals was housed there, or a horse was being saddled. Veryovkin's study was furnished like any other lawyer's reception-room; the furniture was tawdry, nude

beauties were hung on the walls, a bear-skin lay beside the desk, provocative terra-cotta statuettes stood on the table, etc. The decanter of vodka and the remains of cured fish on a round table alongside the writing-desk were something of an exception. Looking round, Privalov recalled his last conversation with Vasily Bakharev. As may well be imagined he had not gone that day to visit Lyakhovsky. Nor had he gone the next day. He had been under a strain. For three days the thought never left Privalov's mind that Nadine had gone to the Shatrov Mills. He was tempted to go there himself, but was deterred by the thought that it might be interpreted as pursuit and cause considerable gossip. Furthermore, he had to see his trustees, for he could not go to Konstantin's empty-handed. Privalov had determined to visit Polovodov, who was closer to Veryovkin, so he could obtain certain preliminary data before calling on Lyakhovsky.

"Have some vodka," Veryovkin called out, sticking his curly head out from behind the screen. "There's the decanter. Help yourself. I'm thirsty today for some reason."

"No, thank you."

At that moment the door opened cautiously, and a tall, slender man of about fifty appeared on the threshold; he made a motion to bolt when he saw Privalov, but Nicolas Veryovkin's voice arrested him:

"Is that you, Father? This is a friend—Sergei Alexandrovich. My father, a bit weak in flesh, but a regular Goliath in spirit. All in all, a splendid old man. Want some vodka, Father?"

"Very, very glad," Ivan Veryovkin muttered somewhat hoarsely, holding Privalov's fingers indecisively in his own feminine, slender hand. "The whole town's talking about you," he added without releasing Privalov's hand. "Very, very glad to meet you."

Ivan Veryovkin's bent, lean figure with its spindle shanks gave little support to the fact that Nicolas was

flesh of his flesh. His little head was most respectably bald, giving the impression that all the hair on its crown had been licked off by a cow or some other animal with as large a tongue. This unique little head was screwed on to a long sinewy neck with Adam's apple so prominent that it made the neck look as though it was tied in a knot. An irregular nose, thick eyebrows, faded grey eyes and thin side whiskers gave Ivan Veryovkin the look of one intently listening to something. He was clad in a long coat of English cut. A new straw-coloured glove, which he had forgotten to take off, invested one hand. When Nicolas finally appeared from behind the screen dressed in a pale-yellow pongee suit, his father said with a troubled expression and his usual sheepish smile:

"I dropped in on a little business, Nicolas."

"Lost again, I suppose?" his son asked.

Ivan Veryovkin twitched his shoulders and cast a side-long glance at Privalov.

"Don't be alarmed, Father. Sergei Alexandrovich knows perfectly well that you and I aren't millionaires," Nicolas boomed good-naturedly, slapping his father on the back. "Lost again?"

"N-no," his father grunted. "That is, yes. I've got to settle an old gambling debt. And I thought. . . ."

"You've come at the wrong time, Father," Nicolas replied. "All I have just now is a three-ruble note. Take it. It might come in handy."

"No, I don't really need it," the senior Veryovkin uttered. "It's Lomtev. He's after me. The devil's egging him on; I waited much longer when he owed me money."

"Aye, Father; you and I, we always seem to get the worst of a bargain, don't we?" Nicolas laughed. "Would you like some vodka?"

Ivan Veryovkin gracefully refused both the vodka and the three-ruble note, and retired from the study just as

noiselessly as he had entered it. Nicolas tossed off a glass of vodka and said indulgently:

"Splendid old chap! It's only his passion for cards that keeps the larder lean. Well, nothing new? You and I are going to make a little excursion today; starting with a cup of coffee with Mother, and then lunching at Polovodov's. He's really a splendid chap, even if he does always lie like a trooper."

### III

Privalov had come to discuss his case and the "mysterious thread," of which Veryovkin had hinted during their first conversation, but instead the lawyer took him by the arm and led him to the living-room. Agrippina greeted Privalov with the true aristocratic simplicity of a duchess, and bestowed upon him half a dozen of the most gracious smiles in her repertoire.

"We've come to guzzle coffee, Mother," Nicolas explained, slumping into an armchair.

Agrippina glanced at her darling, then shifted her eyes to Privalov, as much as to say: "Be indulgent, my dear Sergei Alexandrovich, and pardon Nicolas's expressions." She gave Privalov to understand in a few words that she had heard of him and was happy to welcome him in her home; then she said a word or two about Petersburg, spoke with a tolerant smile about Uzel, which, she said, was on its way to fame unlike most other provincial towns. In reply Privalov said what is usually said in such circumstances; that is, he hastened to agree with Agrippina, tried putting in a word of his own, and grunted respectfully and approvingly. In conclusion, he did not fail to notice that he was in the very heart of the Uzel *beau monde* and that Agrippina was a lady with gracious aristocratic manners. Agrippina, for her part, concluded that in spite of Privalov's somewhat uncouth appearance, the

question of whether or not he would be popular with the weaker sex remained open at that juncture.

Their delightful conversation, which was more like an all-round examination of Privalov, was interrupted by Nicolas:

"Ah, there's Uncle!"

Standing in the door Privalov saw, not the uncle alone, but a tall, slender girl in Ukrainian costume who stared at Privalov with playfully narrowed eyes. "Probably the girl with a spark in her," he thought, scrutinizing her dress. Uncle Oscar belonged to the grade of old men who like to look younger than they are, smile blandly most of the time, perambulate with a mincing gait, adore female company as old bachelors should, and invariably possess some peculiar idiosyncrasy; one is afraid of mice, another is allergic to some perfume, a third devotes his entire life to collecting canes of diverse historical epochs, etc. Uncle Oscar, as we know, loved to fish and had just returned with Alla from some cherished spot on the bank of the Uzlovka. He was still in his canvas coat, and holding his broad-brimmed straw hat. Privalov shook his small hand and he seemed to melt with pleasure, repeating several times:

"Yes, yes, I've heard of your coming, yes!"

"My second daughter Alla," Agrippina sang out after Uncle Oscar deposited himself and his smiles on the settee.

Privalov bowed, and Alla nodded lightly in reply, taking a seat beside her mother. Agrippina made her tell about the fishing, which she did most skilfully, relaying with a burrish enunciation several comic incidents revolving round her uncle.

The coffee came in a silver pot, followed by a handsome wet-nurse in a light blue wimple carrying Vadim.

"Take a look at this work of nature," Nicolas said, taking Vadim in his arms. "My littlest brother."

"Oh, Nicolas," his mother cooed archly, "you *do* say things."

"I don't think I've said *things*, Mother," Nicolas protested, throwing the "work of nature" up in his arms. "It's in the scheme of things to have littlest brothers."

"Absolutely!" his uncle cut in, stroking his round, plump knee, which was much like a dancing girl's. "I knew a very respectable lady who...."

The audience in Agrippina's guest-room never got to hear what the very "respectable lady" did, because the tale was interrupted by a noise in the anteroom. Privalov caught Khiona Zaplatina's voice, alternating with another, rasping one.

"Oh, it's Lepyoshkin, the gold-miner," Agrippina informed Privalov, and glided off majestically to meet Khiona. The ladies kissed resoundingly, but were precipitously separated by a large grey head, which quite familiarly planted a kiss on the hostess's shoulder.

"Oh, how you frightened me!"

"I don't bite, dear," uttered the old man, grey, fat as a barrel, patting her shoulder. He was dressed in a sleeveless velvet coat and a calico shirt; his baggy cloth breeches were tucked into the bottle-shaped tops of his boots. "Oh, I'm pooped out, my good people," he mouthed, raising his short, fat hand with its stubby red fingers.

Nodding curtly to Privalov, Khiona was embracing Alla, whispering to her, "How pretty you look today, *mon ange*." Lepyoshkin rolled like a ball up to the table, and Agrippina introduced him to Privalov.

"Knew your old man," Lepyoshkin said. "Knew him very well. He was the number-one man in our parts. Won't find an equal to him nowadays. They're all chicken-hearted. Heard about you too, sir. We may be living in the woods, but when they're chopping wood in town splinters happen to fly our way too."

Lepyoshkin lowered his perspiring, bloated face to Al-



la's hand, greeted Uncle Oscar, slapping him on the knee, and stated, sinking heavily into a chair:

"Oh, I'm pooped out. It's hot! I'd love some kvass."

"Run to my study," Nicolas said, "you'll find something for the inner man."

"Oh? Something to shoe a legless puppy?" the gold-miner chuckled.

Nicolas nodded.

"Very well, we'll go, the two of us, His Excellency and I," Lepyoshkin uttered, rising to meet Ivan Veryovkin who was sidling up to him on his thin legs. "Greetings to the older generation."

"Let's go. I'm game," Ivan Veryovkin replied, taking Lepyoshkin under the arm; side by side they were suggestive of the numeral 10.

"Amusing gentleman," Agrippina laughed when the numeral 10 vanished in the door. "Alla, bring Mr. Lepyoshkin some kvass," she added. "He's always so good to you."

"Lepyoshkin's very clever," Khiona put in her kopek's worth. "He only pretends to be a simpleton. An ordinary muzhik, he's made a hundred thousand. Yes, he's very, very clever!"

In the meantime, the following episode was taking place in Nicolas's study.

"Dear, dear Lepyoshkin, help me out," Ivan Veryovkin pleaded, driving his companion into a corner. "Just two hundred rubles, just a trifle; a mere two hundred! I'll return them in a week."

"Don't I know how long your week is?" Lepyoshkin replied gruffly, wiping his bloated face with a checkered cotton handkerchief. "It's much too long, Ivan, that week of yours."

"Want me to go down on my knees? I'll do it," Veryovkin insisted.

"D'you think I'm a mint?"

"Don't make difficulties," old Veryovkin fought back. "Only two hundred rubles! If you want, I'll write a promissory note for four hundred."

"Stuff and nonsense," Lepyoshkin exclaimed. "Last year's snow and your notes are just the same!"

"Oh, you old buzzard!" Ivan Veryovkin groaned, holding his head. "Just two hundred—making difficulties."

"Why d'you want the money?" Lepyoshkin asked.

"Ah, heavens! Remember those Irbit merchants at the 'Magnet'? Well, they'll be at Lomtev's tonight. Understand?"

"By all means. I understand. You want to win. . . ." Lepyoshkin chuckled.

"Why don't you give me the money then?"

"You'll spend it on the women."

"Lepyoshkin, my dear boy!" Ivan Veryovkin pleaded, dropping to his knees. "I promise you! I shan't! We'll play all night. My head's fresh."

"It ought to be, since you have no money. That's the way it always is with your kind."

"I won't overreach myself; I'm sure to win. Just think of it—Irbit merchants. That's a chance in a million! Lomtev and I will clean them out," Veryovkin continued.

"I know you'll clean them out," Lepyoshkin said gruffly, pulling out a fat wallet. "You have a fine head on your shoulders, Ivan, but there's a hole in it. You wouldn't be down on your knees in front of a muzhik like me if it hadn't been for your silly goings-on with the females. Well! Here's the money, but it better be back on my desk tomorrow. That's all. And I don't want any of your notes. They're only good for kindling."

Ivan Veryovkin made no reply and stuffed the money into his side-pocket together with his silk handkerchief. Ten minutes later the two cronies re-entered the guest-room. Alla handed Lepyoshkin a glass of kvass, her sleeve

sliding up and exposing her dimpled arm, white as ivory, up to the elbow; the sly old gold-miner screwed up his narrow, bleary eyes, and said, taking the glass:

"What's good is good! That's the way I like it. There's a good girl, warming the cockles of an old man's heart. Her shirt made of seven silks, and her sarafan pretty as anything, and the kvass out of her own hands! Thank you heartily, my dear."

Privalov was again told how essential it was for young men to have their fun, and that it was available only at the Social Club, and not at all at the Nobles Society. Khiona put in a word about the "prig" and Lyakhovsky, who, admittedly, were very wealthy men, etc. This stream of small talk grew livelier when it touched upon the array of Uzel brides.

"The Bakharevs are a fine family!" Khiona said, screwing up her eyes ecstatically.

"Oh yes," Agrippina chimed in with just the right measure of importance. "Nadine Bakhareva and Zosya Lyakhovskaya are our first beauties. Oh, yes. You haven't seen Zosya, have you? An extraordinary beautiful girl. She isn't as clever as Nadine, but there's something about her. You'll see for yourself."

"Nadine Bakhareva has gone to the Shatrov Mills," Khiona reported, turning away from Privalov. "She runs her brother's household. A highly intelligent, educated girl."

"I hear she studied with Doctor Sarayev?" Agrippina asked.

"Yes, indeed—together with Zosya Lyakhovskaya. They studied with the doctor first, and then with Loskutov."

"Oh, I say," Agrippina drawled, "I didn't know!"

"Yes. Loskutov still comes to the Lyakhovskys. They say he's a splendid person: speaks five languages, travelled all over Russia, and as far as America."

"Well, if they've started talking about girls it's high time for us to go," Nicolas declared. He rose from his chair. "Mother, you'll excuse us. We're going to visit Polovodov. Well, good-bye everybody. Khiona, will you let Lepyoshkin and myself join your boarding-school this autumn to polish up our French?"

In parting Agrippina indicated to Privalov that she, a wretched provincial, scarcely dared to hope that he would honour her with a second visit, since she had probably bored him this time; she scarcely dared to suggest, moreover, that he come to one of her Thursdays.

"No, no. I'll come again, I assure you," Privalov declared, somewhat taken aback. "If you allow me, I'll come the very next Thursday."

"He'll come for sure, Mother," Nicolas intervened. "We'll even think up something in the way of a game of cards."

"Why not come again?" Privalov was thinking as he descended the stairs. "Agrippina Veryovkina appears to be a very respectable lady."

A hush fell over Agrippina's guest-room after the door closed behind Privalov and Nicolas. Everyone brooded over the Privalov fortune, which had just been here, sat here, drank coffee. Uncle Oscar craned his neck sideways and fixed his eyes on the armchair in which Privalov had sat a minute ago; he even fingered the upholstery, as though some of the Privalov fortune might have stuck to it.

"Ah, leave him to the flies and mosquitoes!" Lepyoshkin uttered, breaking the silence. "An inheritance of four millions, eh? If we could only have a whiff of all that money! Eh, Oscar?"

"Yes, indeed," that worthy replied, crossing his little legs. "Just a whiff! Come across very wealthy men sometimes."

"What we wouldn't do, you and I, if we had all that money, eh, Ivan?" Lepyoshkin continued. "We'd celebrate a mass that'd turn the devil's stomach, wouldn't we?"

Ivan Veryovkin made no reply, but looked wistfully at the door through which Privalov had just departed. "If I only inherited a bit of that fortune," the pious man thought modestly, but recovered instantly and said to himself, "No, it's better this way. The harlots and actresses would get it anyway—Marusya, and that redhead. Ah, what an imp of a redhead! Saucy bit of baggage!"

#### IV

At the front-door the muzhiks whom Privalov had seen earlier in the day surrounded Veryovkin. They bared their heads as before, and the one-eyed muzhik went down on his knees before Veryovkin, pleading for "liberation."

"Tomorrow—tomorrow. Can't you see I'm busy?" Veryovkin was saying as he helped Privalov into his battered carriage drawn by a pair of bays. "Tomorrow, my men!"

"Give us cause to pray for you," the one-eyed muzhik shouted louder than the others, throwing his torn cap to the ground. "We can't bear it any longer. Free us, sir!"

"How'd you like to be in my shoes? They practically jumped down my throat," Veryovkin exclaimed as the carriage rolled briskly down the wide Flour Street, which led to the monastery. "All clients of mine," he added, nodding his head at the row of Uzel flour shops. "No matter that the shops look like they cost three rubles; they coin money in them. In a shop like that there's nothing to see—just a dozen or so sacks of flour, and a handful of oats, millet, peas and other cereals in the show-boxes. A dozen mice would go hungry in them, it'd seem, but they coin money!"

The carriage drew up alongside Polovodov's squat single-storeyed wooden house, which had a tall gable roof and a carved horse's head on the barge-board. The façade, windows and gates were all covered with fine Russian-style wood-work and were painted to look like oak. The small verandah opening into the garden was much like an aquarium drained of water. The large, palmate leaves of a philodendron, camellias, palms and araucarias clustered against the panes of the narrow windows. A long log structure with a glass roof, something that could be a hothouse, a photographer's studio or a theatre, stood in the yard, while a shady garden of lime-trees, bird-cherry trees, acacias and lilac shrubs ran down to the bank of the Uzlovka, studded with "Chinese arbours in the Russian fashion," flower plots, a large glass ball, and even a miniature fountain with white marble nymphs. The little house was furnished in good taste and represented what is known as a home of plenty. Everything was made in the Russian style, from the door-bell to the smallest nail, and practically trumpeted out loud that life in this cosy nest was comfortable and pleasant. After the ambiguous splendour of Agrippina's establishment the eye involuntarily rested on each article of this trim little household, and the visitor was enveloped by an atmosphere of well-being and wealth the moment he crossed its threshold. A proverb carved in Slavonic letters above the door to the guest-room said: "Rather have a hundred friends than a hundred rubles."

"An arithmetical truism," Veryovkin observed, divesting himself of his impressive overcoat. "A hundred rubles isn't much, while twenty-five borrowed from each of the hundred friends will run up to a handsome figure."

"Mr. Polovodov is taking a bath," the butler announced.

"Well, announce us to his wife," Veryovkin ordered.

"She's out," the butler replied.

"Isn't that fine! The host is having his bath, the hostess is out."

"No, no, by all means, I'm here," they heard a pleasant, throaty baritone, and a tall, slim gentleman dressed in a grey summer suit appeared in the doorway of the guest-room. "If I'm not mistaken," he added in a singsong voice, squinting his somewhat short-sighted greenish-grey eyes, "I have the pleasure of seeing Sergei Alexandrovich Privalov?"

"Well, now, don't start your ten thousand Chinese courtesies," Veryovkin muttered, while Polovodov shook Privalov's hand and peered lovingly into his eyes. "Brightest brother of the sun, transparent blue of the sky.... Listen, Alexander, I'm simply boiled; take us somewhere not too far away where it's cool, and have something refreshing brought to us. I have a prize thirst today. Oh, well, let me take care of things myself. Hey, man, bring some vodka to the terrace and some pickles. Sergei Alexandrovich, follow me!"

On their way to the verandah they passed through the dining-room finished in old dark oak, with a tiled stove, an ornamented multi-coloured ceiling, and several carved oak cupboards. A long oak table stood in the middle of the room, covered with a coarse gaudy tablecloth fringed with blue and red cockerels. Above the door to the dining-room it said in the same Slavonic lettering: "It is the food it serves, and not its furnishings, that graces a house." Then there was the legend, "Even a hen drinks," on one of the cupboards. Privalov looked askance at his host, who was striding by his side, lightly holding Privalov's elbow, as though he were some lunatic trying to escape. Privalov thought at first that his host looked ordinary and grey; his face was grey, and so were his eyes, his hair, and his suit. Then he noted that Polovodov's lower jaw was particularly well developed; French anatomists call such jaws "galoshes." Out on the veran-

dah, seated at a small round table in a green garden chair, Privalov glanced again at Polovodov's gaunt shape and thought: "Looks like he's been stretched." Polovodov's long, lifeless face was touched with a thin sand-coloured hirsute covering; his wide-open eyes had an inanimate but tense look, and his large, sensuous lips and strong white teeth lent his face a hard, singularly unpleasant expression. And when Polovodov spoke in his rich, throaty baritone it seemed someone else was speaking behind his back.

"This way," Veryovkin shouted to the butler when the latter appeared with two trays. "Give your master the cups, and the decanter to me and Sergei Alexandrovich."

"No, I shan't drink vodka," Privalov warned.

"You didn't want any this morning either." Veryovkin screwed up his leaden eyes.

"Nicolas, this isn't the time for vodka," Polovodov intervened, pushing a quaintly shaped cup towards Privalov. "Here, Sergei Alexandrovich, better try some home-brewed kvass."

"You must put yourself into God's hands before drinking that kvass," Veryovkin joked, tossing off a glass of neat vodka.

Privalov took several gulps out of his cup; the kvass was magnificent; the fragrant aroma of blackberries blended pleasantly with an astringent flavour, like that of good champagne.

"I'm so happy to see you at last," Polovodov said. He stretched his long legs under the table. "But are you going to stay long?"

"If nothing makes me change my mind I intend staying for good," Privalov replied.

"That's fine; if there's a will, there's always a way. Isn't that so? It's a sin living in the capital in our time. The backwoods are short of hands, particularly hands with a good education."



"Aha, back on your hobby-horse," Veryovkin thought, and added loudly, "You'd try making the backwoods happy with the Mecklenburg system of all-class society and a landed gentry, I suppose?"

"I'm not forcing my views on you," Polovodov said in an injured voice. "One may not agree with another's views and yet respect them. It's worse if one hasn't any views of his own."

"If you're throwing stones at me, it's so much labour lost, Alexander." Nicolas laughed. "It's the same as firing cannon at sparrows. Ha, ha!"

"There you are," Polovodov declared emphatically, lowering his eyelids, "soon as we wink at our own goings-on we're alright. Not so if anyone starts something; we'll ridicule him then. As for me, I respect the very wish of doing something, regardless of what the person wants to do and how he does it. That is a different matter. Don't have to go far for an example; take the Slavophile school. People laugh at it. But you must agree, Sergei Alexandrovich, that apart from the inevitable excess of zeal and extremism so typical of any new movement Slavophiles have their good side—a sense of progress, the vital force of popular self-edification."

"Now you're really started, I see," Veryovkin muttered, and imitated Polovodov mockingly: "The longing for the Russian truth . . . the treasure-chest of folk life. . . . Ha-ha-ha!"

"What I don't like about the Slavophiles is their precept of national exclusiveness," Privalov remarked. "A Russian, it seems to me, is alien to such ideas because of his Slavonic nature. He has always had an excessive tendency to fraternize with other nations and blindly imitate foreign customs. That's easily explained if you turn to our history, a succession of acts in which dozens of other nationalities were assimilated. To attribute some-

thing it does not have to a nation is both pointless and unjust."

"What about the other nations? We've seen Italy and Germany unite. Now it's the turn of the Slavs."

"That's where the Slavophiles contradict their own arguments," Privalov retorted. "They take a foreign point of view, and thereby disown their own convictions, as it were."

"Well said, ha-ha-ha!" Veryovkin, jubilant, threw back his head. "Well, Alexander, your stocks are falling."

Polovodov only stared at Privalov with his fish eyes and chewed his lips. "So, he isn't as stupid as Lyakhovsky said," he mused, summoning up his thoughts and drumming nervously with his thin white fingers against the side of his cup.

## V

"Tony, darling, you've delivered me. I'm like Daniel thrown into the lions' den!" Veryovkin exclaimed boisterously when a tall, plump woman in a green dress and straw hat appeared in the doorway. "Just imagine, your spouse is locked in verbal battle with Sergei Alexandrovich, and the two are now bombarding each other with learned phrases. My head is simply reeling!"

"Tony, allow me to present our dear guest," Polovodov turned to his wife, introducing Privalov.

Tony, or Antonida, Polovodov's wife, stately and tall, possessed a unique, languid type of beauty. She was strikingly beautiful from tip to toe—her small white forehead, the soft silken rings of her blonde hair, and the babyish plump chin. Her rounded nape with its short golden locks was separated from the white, finely moulded neck by a soft crease, as in a plump child. There was a strange, winning languor in every fold of her dress, in all her movements, in her glorious, lazy, light-brown eyes. In

summer the heat made Antonida miserably unhappy; her dresses were all invariably too tight. Nicolas had an explanation for it. It was hereditary, he said, for an eternal fire burned in the blood of the Veryovkins, causing an eternal thirst.

"I hope I'm not interrupting," Antonida uttered hesitantly from the doorway, where her graceful figure was outlined to best advantage against the gaping darkness of the door. "*Maman* has told me all about Sergei Alexandrovich," she added, fumbling with her Swedish gloves.

Privalov looked at her quizzically, and put his left hand on his right, which still felt the warmth of Antonida's handshake. This warmth coursed through his body, throwing him into confusion, and he did not know what to say to his hostess who was talking in quiet, measured tones about her Uncle Oscar and *maman*.

"Tony, dear, let's have something to eat!" Veryovkin pleaded, raising his eyebrows comically. "It's past four. Tell them to serve it right here. It's fine outside."

Antonida smiled benignly, much like Agrippina, and, nodding her head slightly, vanished in the doorway without another word. "She's the image of her mother," Privalov thought. Beside his wife Polovodov looked even more haggard and lifeless, like a cured fish.

The dinner was nothing out of the ordinary, but everything was prepared with such consummate skill, with such a profound knowledge of the human palate, that anything better could scarcely be desired. It opened with an extraordinary, perplexing soup of pot-herbs and fish *à la Russe*, preceded by a series of yellow-golden, bitter, steeped liqueurs of a most astounding quality, and by a greenish leaf infusion which was a *chef-d'oeuvre* in its own right. The liqueur was sipped from miniature Bohemian cut-glass cups with inlaid vignettes and proverbs, such as "Drunk and clever—two virtues," "Drunk I've been, but never lost my head," etc.

The table was laid in the fashion of the day, with fringed plates, silver-handled knives and forks, and a soup bowl shaped as an ancient spouted vessel, all to the Russian taste.

"You had another liqueur, Tony," Veryovkin begged after doing honour to the leaf infusion, "one that made you giddy after the first thimbleful."

"One thing at a time," his sister replied in a tone used ordinarily with children when they ask for the moon.

Veryovkin sighed and lowered his red face over his plate. After the soup Privalov thought he had had enough; his head had begun to reel pleasantly. But Polovodov kept looking expectantly at the door from time to time, and beamed when the butler appeared at last bearing a round dish, mysteriously covered with a serviette. On accepting the dish from the servant's hands Polovodov announced festively, as though a new-born infant had just been deposited on the table:

"Gentlemen, attention! Stuffed loaf."

Stuffed loaf was a novelty, and attracted everybody's interest. It was delectable and seemed to melt in the mouth. Polovodov relaxed, deeply absorbed in eating. The loaf was followed by hazel-grouse, fresh venison and many other courses. Every course had its own profound essential purpose, and every piece of food was dispatched with a festive air suggestive of a ritual. Needless to say each course was preceded and followed by an appropriate wine of a certain temperature, drunk in special wine glasses, poured in a special way and swallowed in the oddest manner. One wine was drunk in large gulps, another in small gulps, with a third they first rinsed the mouth, and a fourth was sipped in mere drops, etc. Veryovkin and Polovodov thoroughly enjoyed each bite of food, chewing it for long with blank faces. Privalov noted how vigorously Polovodov's lower jaw worked, and thought involuntarily: "He's absolutely carried away." Veryovki

sucked each little bone, smacking his lips and wiping them lovingly with his napkin.

"The right way to eat!" Privalov thought again, quite unable to swallow another bite. "I'll go mad!"

Antonida examined Privalov's broad, good-humoured face and thought: "He's not bad, this Privalov. Why did *maman* say he couldn't hope to make a hit with the women? He appears to be a bit shy, but that'll pass." Privalov felt her piercing gaze, which seemed to suffuse him with warmth, and was somewhat embarrassed. The conversation at table was but an extension of the drawing-room nonsense that reigned in Agrippina's guest-room. They recounted the latest news, all of which Privalov had already heard from Victor Bakharev, and spoke of some mining engineer who was pursued by a bear while hunting.

"You haven't yet been to the Lyakhovskys?" Antonida asked, taking a dish of strawberries from the servant with her milk-white, plump hand.

"No, I haven't," Privalov replied. "I'd rather go to Lyakhovsky with your husband."

"Oh, by all means. Gladly! Whenever you say," Polovodov uttered, leaning back in his armchair.

"Alexander's always glad to visit the Lyakhovskys," Antonida observed.

"I knew it!" Veryovkin ejaculated, abandoning a bone. "Those women! They're delicate stuff! Watch out, Sergei Alexandrovich, it'll come now: 'Zosya Lyakhovskaya is a beauty, Zosya Lyakhovskaya is wealthy.' Zosya is the only light in the window, as the Russians say. As for me. I wouldn't give it a second thought if she hadn't existed at all; she's haggard, flimsy stuff. That's all I can say."

Veryovkin supplemented with an eloquent gesture what the tongue could not achieve to express.

"I've already heard that she's a beauty," Privalov remarked, smiling.

"All the men are mad about her," Antonida replied gravely.

"Just leave me out, Tony," Veryovkin pleaded, puffing and fanning his face with a napkin.

Antonida said to him quietly:

"I can say nothing about you, Nicolas. Zosya ignores you, and you're furious."

"Good heavens!" Veryovkin roared good-naturedly. "Doesn't my person warrant any interest at all? True, my French is pretty poor. But am I really so much of an oaf that respectable girls won't love me at all?"

"It isn't your person so much," Antonida came back, "it's—but you better ask my husband. He might tell you how to please Mademoiselle Zosya."

"Oh, it's very simple; just don't be a bore," Polovodov replied cheerfully. "When you and I call on Lyakhovsky, Sergei Alexandrovich," he added turning to Privalov, "I'll introduce you to Zosya. She's a nice girl. What's more, she's clever. All our ladies hate her. Their hate for her, as a matter of fact, is just about the only thing on which they agree."

"Victor Bakharev has already promised to introduce me to Mademoiselle Lyakhovskaya," Privalov said.

"Victor Bakharev? Ha, ha!" Polovodov laughed. "He hasn't shown up at the Lyakhovskys' for more than a fortnight. Overreached himself, that boy! He's assured Zosya that he'd start a juvenile magazine in Uzel. Ha, ha!"

The dinner ended on a high note. But when Lafitte and Chambertin were served Privalov declared that he would not drink another drop. Veryovkin dozed in his armchair, labouring with his nose like a tug-boat. Polovodov again clutched his guest's elbow and piloted him gingerly, as though he were ill, to his study "to talk a bit of business." The study was in a small corner room. The desk, in the middle of the room, stood in a ring of quaint chairs with

tall carved backs, upholstered with red gilt-stamped leather. Polovodov showed Privalov to an armchair of so unusual a shape that the guest simply did not dare to seat himself in it. It was like one of those elevated seats in which bishops sit.

"Here are all the trusteeship papers," Polovodov said, pointing with his finger to an oak cupboard in the corner. "But that was an awful thing to happen, that affair with your brother. We have our hands full now. Lyakhovsky and I are terribly upset. Tit was at Tideman's boarding-school near Zurich. Then we got a telegram: 'Tit Privalov disappeared.' Now we must look for him all over Europe. When we call on Lyakhovsky, we'll have to discuss the matter in closer detail, I suppose, but now, if you'll allow me, I'll give you a general outline of our trusteeship."

"Perhaps some other time?" Privalov pleaded, averse to talking business after the sumptuous dinner.

"As you please, Sergei Alexandrovich," Polovodov returned. "There'll be time enough to discuss your affairs when we call on Lyakhovsky. Well, then, how'd you find Vasily Bakharev? Clever old man. I respect him deeply, though we've had a misunderstanding over the trusteeship. He seems to think I was the cause of his removal. I hope that as soon as you know the state of affairs better you'll explain it all to the stubborn old man. It's rather awkward for me to do it. You know, it's always awkward to explain things yourself."

"As far as I know," Privalov said, "Vasily Bakharev has nothing against you or Lyakhovsky. He spoke about the report."

"Ah, yes. The report is a bother. But the two of us didn't have anything to do with it; it's now making the rounds of the Trusteeship Council for the second year running. But it's rather awkward assuring Bakharev that we've nothing on our hands except rough notes. What's more, we aren't obliged to report to him at all, and it was

only to avoid friction—all in all, I'm terribly happy that you've come at last, Sergei Alexandrovich, to see for yourself. You've heard about Lyakhovsky, of course. He has his peculiarities, but he's a clever man. You'll see. Are you going to visit the Shatrov Mills?"

"Yes," Privalov replied, "at the first opportunity."

Privalov departed empty-handed, and carried away an indefinite impression of the host, who was either uncannily clever, or a perfect fool. Privalov promised to go with him to Lyakhovsky's the next day, or the day after. Antonida made her appearance in the guest-room and said with a lazy parting smile:

"We'll expect you, Sergei Alexandrovich."

Privalov felt her warm eyes fixed upon him, and, shaking her plump hand with its soft pink fingers, again felt its pleasant warmth.

"You should hear her sing our Russian songs," Veryovkin said as they were stepping out of the house. "I'll ask her to sing next time. It'll give you no end of pleasure!"

## VI

Polovodov had the reputation of being a businessman of the newest type, and that of a public speaker second only to Veryovkin. He spoke better than Veryovkin, as a matter of fact, but was too long-winded, and lacked the fire of Veryovkin's oratory. It was only his wish to show off his rhetoric that prompted him to serve two three-year terms as chairman of the local Zemstvo. He ran its affairs quite badly, however, and there were persistent rumours that in spending its funds he never forgot himself. His well-paid job as director of the Uzel-Mokhov Bank and the tidy sum he received for being trustee of the Shatrov Mills allowed him to live in style and think up diverse extravagant pursuits. A kind of inanity came over him from time to time, and on one occasion, for instance, he



went off abroad, kicked his heels at various spas, spent some time in Paris, made a trip to Egypt and the Sinai Peninsula, and returned an Englishman from head to foot, in an Indian pith helmet and a dusty-green suit, and with a distinct Albion drawl. He decorated his Uzel home in the manner of Englishmen and for two years played the part of an Uzel squire. When the wind changed, Polovodov gave up his helmet, for which Veryovkin had nicknamed him Fireman, and changed the house to its present state. His marriage to Antonida was an upshot of his current passion for the earthy treasures of folk culture; he liked her plump shoulders, her white neck, and, besides, she fitted in wonderfully as the mistress of the newly decorated Russianized home with its painted ceilings and cockerels. For about six months Antonida played her role of typical Russian beauty and was made to wear old-fashioned sarafans with golden trimmings. But the newly-weds soon tired of the game, and the sarafans were cast off to join the pith helmet stowed away in some out-of-the-way nook. But the couple, it seemed, did not take this close to heart and were perfectly content with the reputation of a happy pair. Antonida was quite indifferent to her situation, satisfied with the part of an independent married woman. In her heart of hearts she thought herself extremely lucky, well aware from the example of her father, Ivan Veryovkin, what freaks one was liable to pick for a husband. Polovodov had an amorous disposition and was always in love with someone, like a fourth-form pupil, but his passions cooled quickly, and Antonida only winked at them. She had an excellent carriage of her own, a pair of decent trotters, and the opportunity of shopping and visiting dressmakers as often as her heart desired. What more could she want? All the Uzel ladies thought her a happy woman and Alexander Polovodov a perfect husband. True, Antonida thought wistfully how much she would like to have a little girl

and a boy, or two girls and a boy, whom she would dress in the latest fashion and take for drives in her carriage, but this longing remained no more than a longing, for the Polovodovs had no children.

Privalov's appearance on the scene changed nothing in the Polovodov household.

"He's so ingenuous," Agrippina Veryovkina said. "Somewhat dense and simple, but could be the hero of a novel."

Antonida mused over the word "ingenuous," and it kept coming back to her all evening. Even at night, when she was alone with her husband in the bedroom and glanced at his gaunt, ungainly figure, it crossed her mind again: "Ingenuous—ah, yes, ingenuous!" Her husband did not disgust her any more than usual that night, and she slept most enviably, like a young girl with an unclouded conscience. This could scarcely apply to Alexander Polovodov, however. He kept tossing restlessly in his bed, and rubbing his forehead, as though he wished to erase some idea from his head. In the morning, Polovodov waited until his wife woke up and was even inspired by the sight of her, sleeping sweetly on her embroidered pillow, her white plump arms raised above her head. He kissed her gently on the neck where the appetizing fold circled it, and for an instant his wife again appeared to him a typical Russian beauty.

While Antonida was splashing about in her washstand Polovodov, seemingly turning some thought over in his mind, uttered indecisively:

"Tony, darling, how did you like Privalov?"

"I? Privalov?" Antonida replied in surprise, turning her wet face to her husband, traces of soap on her neck and bare shoulders. "Ah, yes, ingenuous," flitted through her head, and she smiled.

"Listen, Tony, try and make Privalov like being at our house. Understand?" her husband said.

"What can I do to make him like it?" she asked.

"Oh, don't be dense. Ask *maman* to teach you. She knows better than I," Polovodov replied with a grin.

That morning was a surprise for Antonida; Alexander behaved as in the days of the famous sarafans. But his bout of tenderness did not excite her in the least. She was unable to pay him back in the same coin.

Privalov's arrival had made Polovodov sit up, because he associated much more than immediate material gain with the Shatrov Mills trusteeship. All his ambitions and hopes for the future revolved round it. In point of fact, they were still vague and indefinite, but he loved to ruminate on the subject and hungered for a good share of the pudding that now lay within his reach. But how to appropriate it? He cudgelled his brains over it in vain and kept jumping from one plan to another. There simply had to be a way, a solution, but so far Polovodov only sensed its existence.

"It takes grit, a firm, bold hand," Polovodov thought, pacing up and down his study. "And there's that fool Lyakhovsky; does nothing himself, and keeps getting in my way. Must get rid of him."

The thought of becoming sole master of the Privalov trusteeship took his breath away, particularly now that he saw that Privalov was not in the least dangerous. Polovodov was getting about twenty thousand a year, but that was a wretched, niggardly pittance compared with what he could get if his hands were freed. Lyakhovsky was an unsuitable partner for Polovodov's ambitious schemes. He was too rich to take part in a risky undertaking. Besides, he was a fastidious coward. He would never rise to the brilliant idea Polovodov was nursing in his brain, suffering torments of doubt and lack of confidence in his own powers.

During one such spell of irresolution, when Polovodov was in one of his blackest moods, Uncle Oscar entered

his study. The old man breathed his usual vim and vigour, which were in marked contrast to Polovodov's gaunt, grey figure.

"What's the fool celebrating?" Polovodov thought maliciously when Uncle Oscar gave him his sticky, ingratiating leer.

"Well, how's your fish?" Polovodov asked, wondering what he should say to his visitor.

"Oh, it's still loose in the water. Aye! Patience, Alexander, patience is the thing. Particularly where fish is concerned. Let it have its day. We'll bag it in good time."

The old man chuckled and rubbed his hands cheerfully; his cackle, and particularly his piercing glance, made Polovodov sit up. What fish could he be talking about? Meanwhile, Uncle Oscar grinned on and pulled out his golden snuff-box. He had a peculiar way of snuffing tobacco, like the old men of Tsarina Catherine's time.

"Well, how did you find Privalov?" he asked, toying with his snuff-box.

"Oh, not particularly impressive. Neither fish nor fowl."

"I knew him slightly in Petersburg," Uncle Oscar continued.

"You knew Privalov?"

"Yes, in a way. I didn't know him personally, but through others. A very decent young man. Pity you didn't get along," Uncle Oscar went on.

"What makes you think we didn't get along?" Polovodov asked.

"I heard Privalov's starting a case against the trusteeship and has already engaged a solicitor," Uncle Oscar explained.

"You mean Nicolas? That isn't news. But they'll hardly gain their ends; Privalov has already tried in Petersburg, and got nowhere."

"Yes, I know," Uncle Oscar retorted. "But it makes a difference where he tries—here or in Petersburg."

Uncle Oscar gave Polovodov to understand that he knew the trusteeship affair in minutest detail, and, in particular, all its weak points. Polovodov listened to the grinning German with mounting surprise, and finally uttered:

"Where did you get all that information? What good is it to you?"

"Mere curiosity," Uncle Oscar replied modestly, stretching his limbs languidly. "It seems to me, Alexander, that you ought to have a solicitor of your own in Petersburg, one who would watch developments at first hand. That's important, especially if you find a good, experienced man."

"Someone like you, I suppose?" Polovodov muttered distrustfully with a grin.

"Why not? I'll accept gladly. I even have a plan—a very original plan. And just one condition: you take half of the spoils, and I take half. But before I disclose it, you must tell me whether you trust me. Say just what you're thinking this very moment," Uncle Oscar demanded.

"I don't trust you, Uncle Oscar," Polovodov replied.

"Fine. Splendid," Uncle Oscar continued unperturbed. "It's important to know each other's attitude. That comes first. So there'll be no misunderstanding later. It's most important. Your candour does you honour. And what if I tell you, Alexander, that we shall gradually do away with Lyakhovsky, place you at the head of the undertaking, and finally give Privalov just as much, or as little, as we wish. Would you trust me then?"

"I really don't know. I have plans of my own," Polovodov replied.

"Woe to him that is alone. You know the proverb?" Uncle Oscar went on. "Give me your word that if you like my plan we share the profits. You'll see that you can't get along without me. The plan involves several extremely delicate moves."

Polovodov closed the door of his study, lit a cigar and prepared to listen to Uncle Oscar, whom in his heart of hearts he continued to distrust. As often happens with clever men, Polovodov was troubled by trifles—Uncle Oscar's exterior, his cherubic appearance and spotless figure. Uncle Oscar bore no resemblance to the businessmen Polovodov had had to deal with up to then. The grey coat which he wore, and the inevitable German straw hat, disgusted Polovodov. The plump figure of the smiling German was in unpleasant discord with the ostentatious setting of Polovodov's study. It leaped to the eye.

"Let's first diagnose the whole thing," Uncle Oscar resumed softly. "The main heir, Sergei Privalov, is at hand; the middle brother is insane, the younger one is missing. Is that right? The Shatrov Mills owe the treasury about a million rubles; the position of the trustees is shaky. . . ."

"Why d'you think so?" asked Polovodov.

"That's simple. You and Lyakhovsky are hanging on thanks to the Court of Wards and certain connections in Petersburg. Am I right? You can't get around the Court of Wards. Not even in the future. But it won't take much to *buy* it. Its members are, one, a demented doctor of eighty; two, a corrupt police inspector who spent several years in prison; and three, a scribe from a clerical family. They get a monthly salary of twenty-eight rubles each. Am I right?" Uncle Oscar said.

"It appears you know everything," Polovodov marvelled.

"Mere curiosity, Alexander—mere curiosity. The Court of Wards, it follows, will always be in our hands, and will serve us in good stead. Further. The most inconvenient thing is the existence of two trustees; it's a grave impediment. As soon as they find Tit Privalov, who, being of age, has the right to choose his own wards, your posi-

tion, and Lyakhovsky's, will be shaken; you'll lose everything at a single stroke."

"Quite right."

"But there is a way of killing two birds with one stone—getting rid of Lyakhovsky to begin with, and not being dependent upon the heirs."

"Go on."

"By all means. The chief heir, the middle Privalov brother, has not as yet been declared insane, has he?"

"No, not officially," Polovodov replied.

"That's perfect, simply perfect, and please take particular note of it. The whole thing's very simple, like all great discoveries. Simple to the point of absurdity. Now listen: this middle Privalov makes out a great many promissory notes. Then he declares himself bankrupt. The trustees are dismissed. A contest is announced, and you are made chief solicitor. All the heirs become pawns in your hands, and you'll be dependent on the Court of Wards and no one else."

"Stupendous!" Polovodov ejaculated, embracing Uncle Oscar.

"Allow me," the German said modestly, toying with his snuff-box. "Unquestionably, it was a happy thought, and it made me come to the Urals specially."

"To catch the fish? Ha, ha!" Polovodov laughed.

"Allow me. The most important thing is not to lose time, which is highly precious. The next thing is to act simultaneously here and there, to form a duet, so to speak, and proceed according to plan. Should Sergei Privalov have wished, he could long since have rid himself of the trusteeship and undertaken to pay the debt to the treasury in a certain number of years. But he did not wish it himself," Uncle Oscar continued.

"You're mistaken. That's just what Privalov was after when he was in Petersburg, and that's just what his solicitor, Nicolas, will be after now," Polovodov retorted.

"I tell you, Privalov *did not wish it*, not even when a certain individual offered to settle the thing in no time. You see, they had to strike a deal with certain parties, and not grudge them advance payments. Privalov refused to do the one and the other. That's why the affair dragged on for so long. But Nicolas can do on his own what Privalov does not wish to do, and you'll be sunk then. What you need is someone in Petersburg to watch every step Nicolas makes, paralyze all he does and arrange the contest."

"You're a brick, Uncle Oscar—a brick of gold!"

"I may indeed turn into gold if, in the meanwhile, you'll manage to keep Privalov right here in the Urals," the German replied. "That's important, particularly at the time when the other Privalov will declare himself bankrupt. The whole thing may flop if we let Sergei Privalov out of our sight."

"But how can I keep him here?"

"That's your own concern, Alexander. I'll do what I must, and you do what you must," Uncle Oscar said.

"But you may have a bright idea how to keep him here?"

"Hm. I'm surprised to see that you look lightly upon Privalov and haven't even taken the trouble to study him. That's most important, you know."

"But there's nothing to him. He's all there—a bit dense and obsessed by trifles."

"You must add to this that he's very honest," the German supplemented.

"Yes, and that's about all."

"Ah, Alexander! How superficially you look at things—much too superficially!"

"You thought me shrewder, did you?"

"I did."

"Well, tit for tat. Would you like some tea, or kvass, Uncle? You're tired. But we'll talk on."



An impressive-looking servant brought two glasses and several bottles of wine; Polovodov uncorked a bottle of champagne. The servant withdrew and watched respectfully how his master went about it, while Uncle Oscar, ridden with his "curiosity," inspected the furniture, fingered the stamped coffee-coloured upholstery and examined every little thing on the writing-desk. He asked the price of all the knick-knacks, the paper-weight and inkstand, held each article to the light, and even dusted a little statuette with his handkerchief. Polovodov replied to all his questions, but the inspection annoyed him somewhat, and he began again to regard Uncle Oscar suspiciously. But the former ludicrous uncle existed no longer, supplanted by an entirely new man who roused a sense of wonder and respect.

"Why go to all this bother," Uncle Oscar remarked modestly as he accepted the glass of merrily sparkling wine out of Polovodov's hands.

"It's for you; you've opened my eyes," Polovodov replied, wildly enthusiastic, wondering what else he could offer his cherished uncle. "I'm just an infant beside you, Uncle. A particle of your wisdom, that's what I want! You are a Solomon!"

A long, intimate discussion ensued, and the two were highly pleased with each other, shaking hands delightedly on several occasions.

"Well, Uncle Oscar, tell us what you think of Privalov," Polovodov asked, red in the face from all the wine.

"Privalov? Privalov. Hm. Privalov is a complex character, though he may look simple. He's at odds with himself all the time. Besides the Shatrov Mills he also inherited many of the failings and weaknesses of his forefathers. It is just those weaknesses that you must take note of."

"Quite right!" Polovodov agreed. "Privalov comes from a retrograde family."

"Right! Quite right, and, by the way, he has inherited a most fundamental weakness—love of women."

"Privalov?"

"Oh, yes! I assure you! It's this side of him that you must exploit. Women are all-powerful, my dear Alexander."

"I understand. Indeed, I understand everything," Polovodov said.

"Remember one thing: don't bother about girls. They are of little use. What you want is a real woman. Understand? A woman who'd take complete possession of him. Girls with their chastity are no good, though there may be some extremely clever ones among them for all that," Uncle Oscar instructed.

"I understand, dear Uncle. I understand everything."

"Splendid! Now you must act, and I'll depend on your experience in such matters. You're popular with women, aren't you? And you know how to deal with them. It's all up to you now. I have heard in passing that his name was associated with Nadine Bakhareva's and that of Lyakhovsky's daughter," Uncle Oscar declared.

"I say, I'll introduce you to Lyakhovsky," Polovodov interrupted, not listening to his uncle.

"Yes, that's important. We can still make use of him. He'll keep the trusteeship case going in the meantime."

In this way Polovodov and Uncle Oscar concluded their alliance in a most touching manner.

"I hope we'll find a common tongue, dear Uncle," Polovodov was saying as he saw the German out of the house.

"No doubt about it," Uncle Oscar agreed, pulling his straw hat over his eyes. "One hand washes the other. You'll act here, and I'll do my bit in Petersburg."

## VII

Polovodov returned to his study brimming over with joy and elation, a powerful emotion given to man in his younger years. His own study appeared a total stranger at that moment, and he looked round with a compassionate smile at all its artificial magnificence. All this coffee-coloured wall-paper, the drapings on the windows, the furniture—how tawdry they all looked compared with the things now stirring in his imagination. In his study-to-be every piece of furniture would be a work of art, of real, expensive art, which only a connoisseur could fully appreciate. A screen before the fire-place, a book-shelf—oh, how much he could make of these miserable trifles with the help of money!

“Uncle Oscar’s a deep one!” Polovodov uttered aloud, and chuckled. “Who’d ever think such genius was enclosed in so frail a shell?”

Polovodov walked up and down the study, looked out of the window, which opened into the garden and was, as it were, plastered with the climbing greenery of hop and vine. Several green runners peeped into the window, caressing the dusty window-panes with their spiral tendrils. Polovodov flung open the window and looked out at the acacia and poplar paths, the flower-beds and arbours, but the picture failed to reach his consciousness; he was much too excited to enjoy it. He felt cramped, it was stuffy in his study, yet the clock barely showed three—the dearest hour of the summer day when even the dogs stayed indoors. To compose himself he wanted activity, the company of gay, witty people, but that would have to wait until the evening. To kill time he sank comfortably into his quaint armchair, stretched his hand out for the unfinished bottle of champagne and sank into sweet dreams about the future, sipping the cold wine.

"That was nothing, striking on a certain idea," Polovodov mused, recalling the details of his recent talk with Uncle Oscar. "That was within the bounds of possibility; I could have stumbled upon Uncle's idea myself, this idea of declaring that crazy heir bankrupt; but keeping Privalov in Uzel—that, I tell you, is really a brilliant thought. It's genius! A real artist is wanted to pull it off. Aye! And that Uncle of ours has a fine nose for psychology, too! Ha, ha, ha! Women! He has a nose for women as well, the rogue! 'You'll want a real woman,' is what he said. That's just it. But where to get her, that real woman, in this God-forsaken Uzel? But it's an idea. Ha, ha, ha!"

Sipping his wine, Polovodov considered all the women and girls that he knew. Not one of them seemed to suit the order. "No, none of them are any good," Polovodov thought, his eyes closed, reviewing a series of familiar female shapes in his mind's eye. "The Bakharev sisters, Alla, Anna, Anya Poyarkova—they're no good, any of them. They only live to dress and visit. The wretched creatures are unfit for anything besides marriage, which is the acme of all their ambitions, hopes and desires. Pfu! Their little heads can't ever hope to rise to a real idea, an idea that would captivate all their being and make them its slaves. Privalov seems to have his eye on the elder Bakharev girl, but the affair will scarcely come to anything. He's arrived a bit too late for that. Then there's Zosya Lyakhovskaya. She would doubtlessly pull it off, but I can scarcely hope to talk her into it. Besides, she's been acting strangely lately—sort of sour."

"Perhaps she'll still be of some use later on," Polovodov concluded, cracking his fingers. "But that innocence of hers—I'm fed up to the gills with it."

Polovodov's thoughts then turned to the ladies of the Uzel *demi-monde*, but here he only found sordid riff-raff, nothing he could depend upon. Katya Kolpakova was the

only one who could expect temporary success, but even that was questionable. There was a widow, a doctor's widow, an enterprising little woman, but it would be hard to make her play his game.

"Nonsense. Since there's a Hades, we'll find a satan for it," Polovodov comforted himself; he had had glass after glass of the wine unnoticed by himself, and was now quite drunk. "That Uncle of ours, he's something of an eighth wonder. Ha, ha, ha! A pearl!"

Recalling Uncle Oscar's funny figure, Polovodov laughed loudly, and spoke to himself. His monologues, and particularly his strange laughter, reached Antonida's ears, who was at that time passing through the guest-room dressed in a white negligee of diaphanous cambric.

"Who's with the master?" she asked the servant.

"Nobody."

"But I just heard them laugh and talk," Antonida insisted.

"He's alone," the servant repeated.

"Nonsense," Antonida growled and turned her steps to the study.

"May I come in?" she asked, opening a crack in the door.

"Yes, of course."

Antonida stepped in and looked round the empty study. Then she noticed her husband's dull eyes fixed upon her.

"Who were you talking to?" she asked rather severely.

"Myself—ha, ha, ha! He's given me a laugh, that Uncle of ours. Just think!"

"I suppose it was reason enough to get as drunk as a shoemaker?" Antonida asked.

While Antonida was saying what all wives say to their drunk husbands, Polovodov scrutinized his wife, her tall figure in its full bloom of feminine beauty, her handsome face, her intelligent lazy look and languorous eyes. She was indeed beautiful that day, and a happy thought flashed

across Polovodov's mind: why look for a woman elsewhere when she was there, standing before him. Yes, she was the right woman, just the woman he was looking for. Antonida's gown opened near the neck, and he glimpsed the dimples of her neckline where it merged with the chest among the ruffles. Only antique statues could boast of such a finely-moulded bust. Polovodov had a good eye for sculpture and now admired his wife with the eyes of a genuine artist.

"Tony, dear woman," he mumbled, trying to rise from his armchair.

Antonida glanced at him contemptuously and left the room without a word. She was suffering as usual from the heat, and did not care to think of anything at all. By the time she entered the adjacent room she had already forgotten her drunk, loudly guffawing husband.

## VIII

Privalov made up his mind to call on Lyakhovsky the day after his visit to Polovodov. He had to see both his trustees before he could think of going to the Shatrov Mills, which now held a special appeal for him because Nadine had gone there. It was this that compelled him to go to the old Privalov mansion, the present residence of the Lyakhovskys.

At about ten in the morning Privalov was fully dressed, ready to set out for the Polovodovs. But just as he was pulling on his gloves Victor Bakharev made his appearance in his tobacco-coloured cutaway.

"Splendid!" the young man exclaimed, examining Privalov from all sides. "So we're going? But why did you put on your tail-coat? You're liable to scare the good people. Oh, well, let's go."

"But where?" Privalov asked in surprise.

"What do you mean 'where'? A fine state of affairs! A whole week has passed since you showed yourself. Now you ask 'where'? Ah, well, no offence, but Mother's sent me for you. As for me, I don't give a damn! I swear! Sulking away, like a mouse over fodder. What of it if Father hauled you over the coals? He's told *me* to get out, and I don't hold it against him. Not a bit. He's a clever old man, cleverer than you and I, but when you come to think of it, he's old after all, and ill. Mother has been expecting you from day to day, and finally sent me. 'He may have fallen ill, or perhaps we've offended him in some way,' she said. And I told her in just so many words: 'Poppycock. I'll bring Sergei in no time.' Jokes aside, I tell you, let's get going. I haven't much time."

"I was just thinking of going," Privalov lied.

"Don't lie. It's no good. You're afraid of the old man, eh? Well, that's silly. I don't care what's passed between you two. All I know is that the old man will be happy to see you. I'll vouch for that. Besides, we'll go straight to Mother's. Well, are you coming? I've come for you in my carriage."

"By all means," Privalov agreed.

"But take off your tail-coat, lest people mistake you for a scarecrow."

Privalov changed into a frock-coat and wondered all the time whether or not Victor was leading him about by the nose.

"I'll tell you what," Victor Bakharev said, seating himself sideways in the carriage. "If you want to please Mother, drop in some evening, casually, like one of the family. Mother likes to play cards—preference; well, suggest a game, won't you? The old lady loves you like her own flesh and blood, and has even lost weight."

"I'm leaving for the mills," Privalov remarked as they were driving up to the Bakharev house.

"Nonsense! What's the point? Nadine's been there and she'll tell you how things are. In another month I'll come with you."

"Nadine back?" Privalov inquired with a catch in his voice.

"Of course she's back. Think I'd deceive you?"

Marya Bakhareva greeted Privalov with tears in her eyes, grumbling about his forgetting them.

"You may not have wanted to see the old man," she muttered, "but you could have come to me. I've worried so. You're no stranger to us, you know. I've worried myself sick. It's always like that with the old man. He flares up at the slightest little thing."

"I have nothing against your husband," Privalov uttered, "and it was farthest from my thoughts to take offence after our last talk. But I've been having a bad time of it these days."

"Yes, I know how you feel, dear boy. It's hard on you, and twice as hard on me. You've come home, and there's no one to comfort you. Nothing can take the place of a mother's love. There are always people to scold and pin one down, and few to feel for one."

Her simple words touched Privalov, and he kissed the old woman's hand with deep-felt emotion. The old sense of warmth suffused his being, and he no longer felt the solitude of the moment before. Marya Bakhareva's apartment seemed especially cosy. Everything in it, the old-fashioned furniture and the geraniums on the windowsills, breathed a patriarchal simplicity. Involuntarily, he recalled the appointments at Agrippina Veryovkina's and at Polovodov's, where there was so much showy, artificial, gilt-edged ostentation.

"You'd be surprised to know all the things that passed through my mind about you," Marya Bakhareva continued, seating her guest in a low birch-wood settee. "I



thought you might be ill, or that we'd offended you, or God knows what. I couldn't stand it any longer and sent Victor. Perhaps you had other plans?"

"No, not at all."

"Have you been to Lyakhovsky's?"

"Not yet."

"That's what I thought: and how could you? After the reception you had from our old man. He's hot-headed these days. It's from his illness, perhaps, or from age. I can't make it out," Bakhareva stated.

Dosifeya brought the samovar and grunted happily when Privalov addressed her. She told him in sign language that the old, grey-haired man with the big beard was angry, knitted her brows, and even shook her fist at Vasily Bakharev's apartment. Marya laughed gaily and said through her tears:

"There, there, Dosifeya, compose yourself. Let him be. He can do whatever he wants, and we'll do what we think is right."

But the deaf-mute would not be stopped. She explained eloquently with signs and gestures that the grey-haired old man did not love Konstantin either, and that he was an old grouch. Marya Stepanovna made the tea in an old-fashioned tea-pot, whose sides were adorned with quaint flowers.

"Have you called on Polovodov?"

"Yes, the other day."

"It was fun, I suppose? He has an extraordinary gift of gab, and though skinny as a lath he's sharp as a needle. Did you get to see his wife?"

"Yes, I saw her too."

"Like her?"

"Y-yes. She's beautiful. But I didn't get to look at her properly."

"Don't lie, please," the old woman remarked with a smile, and looked at Privalov with narrowed eyes. She was

eager to learn by the expression of his face what impression Antonida had made on him. "He lies," she concluded to herself when Privalov smiled back.

In Bakhareva's opinion Antonida was the first beauty in Uzel, and she often said, nodding her head, "She has everything, that Antonida—plumpness, beauty and poise!" And she recalled with a short sigh that "Nadine hasn't plumpness enough for a real woman, and Vera's skin is swarthy and she has hair on her arms, like a man."

"Well, tell me what Antonida had for dinner," the old woman questioned her guest.

Privalov described the meal as best he could.

"Did you say you ate in the garden?"

"In the garden."

"Your solicitor must have felt the heat. Couldn't you have chosen a better one, I wonder?"

"What's wrong with him?"

"Oh, I'm not saying anything's wrong, and he may be a suitable man for you, that's what I say. But he associated with our Victor so much. I suppose you've visited the Veryovkins?" the old woman asked.

"Yes. I called on them with Nicolas before we went to the Polovodovs."

"Hm. Every time I think about them I wonder who their children are like. The mother's a German, though she speaks French with Khiona Zaplatina; the father is the very image of a sexton, and yet, if you take Antonida—what a beauty they've raised! Or take Nicolas. Look at him from afar, and he's the perfect picture of our Russian merchant. But I'm frightened at the sight of him every time—the way he rolls his eyes, and puffs. They tell me he's reckless and audacious in court, and a carouser and a libertine. See you don't associate with him too much. God forbid."

Soon the whole family gathered round the tea-table. Nadine appeared to be in unusually high spirits. She spoke of her trip to the Shatrov Mills, and of how Konstantin was expecting Privalov, etc. Victor and Vera played the fool, as usual, ignoring their mother's menacing glares.

"Sergei and I will go to the mills together," Victor declared.

"You as auditor, I suppose?" Marya Bakhareva asked mockingly. "Konstantin is simply longing to see you, I'm sure. He can't wait."

"You must first ask Sergei Alexandrovich whether he'll have you with him," Vera put in, stirring her tea.

"You there, Rainbow," Victor snapped at her, "keep your nose out of this."

To amuse the little gathering Victor launched into a long-winded story about Ivan Veryovkin, and in the end Marya Bakhareva would not let him finish it because there were such risqué developments, which were absolutely unfit for the ears of the young ladies present.

"Alright, I shan't go on," Victor agreed. "I'll tell Sergei the rest when we're alone. Whenever sour-faced young ladies appear on the scene all conversation has to cease. But Zosya, now! You can say anything in her presence."

"Don't lie, for Christ's sake," Marya Bakhareva snapped, "don't tell us she'd listen to you. She's not that kind. You've got to be on your toes talking to her."

"Mother," Vera joined in, "Zosya never even talks to Victor. He only helps her put on her overshoes and sometimes runs errands for her."

"When are you going to call on Lyakhovsky?" the old woman turned to Privalov. "You're taking a long time. Besides, you *must* go to the mills."

"Slow but sure wins the race," Privalov replied with a grin.

## IX

"Drop in one of these evenings," Marya Bakhareva told Privalov when he was taking his leave.

"I'll come gladly," he replied, recalling Victor's words about the preference.

"Gladly or not—that's your affair," she rejoined. "It's a bore sitting around with old women. Not much fun in our house, but come anyway."

The evenings at the Bakharevs', however, did not bore Privalov in the least. On the contrary, the hours dragged heavily until the appropriate time came to go there.

Vera was pleased most with Privalov's evening visits, though only the smallest share of his attentions fell to her. What she liked was the fact that a real man, with all the attributes of a suitor, at last kept coming to their house. In the past the evenings had been nauseatingly boring. The gatherings in Marya Bakhareva's half were exclusively female and awfully dull. Old Razmakhnina and Pavla Kolpakova with her eternal lace would be there, and sometimes some other old woman. They would have tea, they would chat, and then cluster round the card-table to play a game of preference. Pavla Kolpakova was sure to come each night, and if they were short of a partner Vera would take a hand, bored to death, yawning into her fist on the sly. Khiona Zaplatina's rare appearances in the midst of these sickening evenings would be a special event, and young Vera always fixed her eyes eagerly upon that lady's mouth, from which the most astounding information poured in an endless, garrulous stream. Vera would even be glad to see the itinerant nuns, pilgrims, and other children of God, because they brought a whiff of fresh air with them to Marya Bakhareva's half, complaining of the most diverse woes, ails and sorrows afflicting the world outside the bounds of the Bakharev ménage.

Vera's father spent six months of the year at the mines, and almost all the evenings of the other six months in his study or visiting his various business friends. As for Victor, needless to say he vanished with astounding punctuality at dusk and returned no earlier than the morning. Nadine rarely showed up in Marya Bakhareva's half in the evenings because, in her mother's words, she usually "pored over books" in her own room. Thus, Privalov's presence created a regular stir, filling the evenings at the Bakharevs' with what may relatively be termed as feverish activity. Pavla Kolpakova made her appearance faithfully every day at the hour of Privalov's arrival, and the three of them sat down to their eternal preference. Marya Bakhareva made Nadine leave her books and participate in the card-game, or entertain the guest.

"What'll I say to him?" Nadine used to ask. "It's hard conversing by request."

"Nonsense," her mother would reply. "You find things to say to others, don't you? Have you lost your tongue?"

"What others?"

"Shush, do you play mum at the Lyakhovskys'?"

"But they don't play preference, and talk when they please and what they please."

"That's enough of you, I say. Why don't you call on Khiona?"

"You know why yourself, Mother."

After Privalov's falling out with her husband, Marya Bakhareva lost hope in her coveted plan. Privalov did not show up for days and Nadine refused point-blank to visit Khiona. Privalov fell undividedly into Khiona's nimble hands, and that lady was sure to make the most of her opportunity. It was at that critical moment that Marya decided to act independently and carry on without Khiona Zaplatina's aid. She was in seventh heaven, seeing that Privalov derived great pleasure from her evenings and

obviously sought Nadine's company. Marya Bakhareva noticed that her daughter's presence animated Privalov and that he cast furtive glances at her.

"God willing, things will go right," Pavla Kolpakova would mumble occasionally, when alone with Marya.

"It's all so involved," Marya sighed. "I can't make him out. There's something missing in him. It's lack of character, I suppose. He makes up his mind to go somewhere, and ends up somewhere else. And it's the same as regards Nadine. He seems to like her, and yet he also seems to be afraid of her. Inconceivable for a man like him to be afraid of a mere girl. And as for her, she's making things complicated herself. I can see right through her; she takes after her father and never throws words to the wind."

"It's the girl's own affair, Marya," Pavla Kolpakova would say. "Nowadays girls are educated and brazen, nothing like us in our day. They have their own way of doing things."

"Whatever they do, they do badly," Marya insisted. "In our day a suitor would take a look at the girl, and then came the wedding-bells. Nowadays it's different. They drag the affair out no end, talk in their clever way, and then come apart. It's just a waste of time, nothing more."

After one boring evening of preference, when her mother left the room to instruct Dosifeya about something concerning the household, Nadine looked keenly at Privalov and asked:

"D'you really like playing cards?"

"Yes," he replied.

"I don't believe it. You just want to please Mother, and are really bored to death."

"On the contrary. I love the peaceful atmosphere in your house, and want nothing better."

The girl looked suspiciously at him and said nothing. But on another occasion she asked him gravely:

"You said that you liked our peaceful atmosphere, didn't you? Did you mean it?"

"Of course I did."

"And don't you feel the dissonance in it?"

"I don't quite grasp what you mean."

Nadine paused, hesitating apparently to express her thought, then, looking into Privalov's eyes, said quietly:

"It's everywhere—the dissonance, and you've already experienced it on your own person, it seems. But in Father it comes to the surface at odd moments and he regrets it later on, pride alone preventing him from admitting his injustice. Take the affair with Konstantin. D'you know why they quarrelled?"

"They seem to have quarrelled over the same thing as he and I—the gold-mines."

"With the only difference that you and Konstantin have different views about the gold-mines. You don't want to be a gold-miner because you think it unproductive. Konstantin thinks it is productive. He fell out with Father over the workers. He says horrible things about labour conditions at the gold-mines and compares them with a prison. But Father insists that he should go there."

"Workers' conditions can be bettered. That's up to the owners," Privalov said.

"That's just it. Konstantin insists upon the very opposite. He says if the workers are to get better conditions even the best gold-mines will operate at a loss. They argued and my brother spoke bitterly about the wealth held by a handful of gold-miners. He referred partly to your family, but Father thought Konstantin meant him and was terribly annoyed."

"Do you think Konstantin was right?"

"A bit of both, I'd say," the girl replied. "He was right that our wealth, for instance, was built upon the sweat and blood of volunteer serfs. But on the other hand, I think Konstantin was wrong. He forgot that Father was raised in a certain spirit, and that he cannot go back upon his viewpoints at his age. What's more, for Father gold-mining is clothed in an aura of Gulyayev and Privalov traditions, and he's a fanatic who views gold-mining as a ritual rather than a source of wealth. That's the first dissonance in our peaceful atmosphere," she concluded with a sad smile. "We live the life of parasites and our money's stained with the blood of thousands of wretches. You must agree that this thought alone is capable of poisoning one's existence."

"Your reasoning is remarkably bold," Privalov replied musingly. "And you know, I've thought the same thing a thousand times—only about my own inheritance. You're tormented by the gold-mines. I have much more on my conscience. Apart from the money accumulated in gold-mining there are still the mills, which stand on land taken from the Bashkirs and were built with the backbreaking toil of our serfs."

"Yes," Nadine agreed. "But you have a way out. You can pay back your debt in one way or another. But it's different with our way of living, our outlook on life, our morals, ambitions, desires. That's just why I spoke to you about dissonance. Take sectarianism, for instance; what's there left of the things for which people died in hundreds, suffered torture, exile, the hardships of vagabondage in the forests, where they lived like hunted beasts? Nothing, really, except dead letters and some of the rituals. Our entire life is bigotry from beginning to end. Look how we treat each other. How much crude dissimulation there is in our relations! And worst of all, we buy peace for our conscience with it."



Nadine spoke with great heat about dissonance and Privalov looked at her with surprise; her face was flushed, her eyes shone, and her words came in an irresistible stream.

"Tell me just one thing, Nadine," Privalov said, "when and how did you come to think of all this?"

"You probably want to know who taught me? That's a long story. It was Konstantin to some extent, and then Dr. Sarayev, who taught Zosya and me, and then, it was books."

Privalov sensed that the girl had left something unsaid.

Conversations of this kind quickly brought Privalov and Nadine closer together. A link evolved between them—a tacit link, but one that was clearly felt. Privalov saw the girl in an entirely new light. She was oppressed by the wealth in which she lived, by each false note, of which there were so many in the Bakharev home, and by her own indolent, useless, aimless role of a rich would-be bride. Often they discovered with joy that they both pondered the same problems, suffered the same doubts and arrived at the same conclusions. Privalov was sure now that Nadine lived under her father's roof only externally, and that beneath the surface her soul belonged to another world, and to other people. Sometimes the girl would speak much too sharply about her own kin, and Privalov could not help feeling that she was under some exclusive, masterful influence, and had much more on her mind than she would say.

Privalov, in his turn, spoke in great detail about his plans for the future. He regarded the Shatrov Mills as a historical debt which he was obliged to repay to the forty thousand people living at the mills, and to the Bashkirs. How he would do it was not clear to him as yet. He would act as circumstances would dictate. That was the only reason why he took such pains to get his inheritance. But

before repaying his obligations he would still have to pay the debt to the treasury, and that would probably take about ten years.

"You'll find Konstantin on your side with the trusteeship and state debt," Nadine told him. "But he'll have little sympathy for your plans of paying your historical debt."

"Why d'you think so?"

"Well, that's obvious. You have no liking for the mills. Konstantin, meanwhile, is a fanatic. He won't hear of anything but the mills."

Privalov told her that industry in Europe and Russia enjoyed unwarranted protection from the state and even from science, and weighed heavily upon the principal source of the people's well-being—agriculture. This was particularly true of Russia, which would long remain a predominantly agrarian country. The Russian iron and steel works built on free land with serf labour were at the moment nothing more than an ulcer, because they could exist only on high tariffs, on guarantees, subsidies and various other privileges, which brought untold harm to the people and benefited only the mill-owners.

"I'm beginning to see light," Nadine said. "I think Father misunderstood you, and will see eye to eye with you once he looks at the matter calmly."

"No, I'm afraid he won't."

"Why?"

"There's a kind of fatalism in it; people who are kin in spirit, in their mode of thinking, in their aspirations and even in their principal ideas, sometimes part ways for good because of the stupidest trifles—an empty phrase perhaps, even a misunderstood word."

"Do you mean trifling misunderstandings cannot be eliminated through ordinary common sense?" Nadine asked him.

"How shall I put it? I do and I don't. Trifles play too big a part in our lives and we are often entirely power-

less against them. They bind us hand and foot and serve as a constant source of new trifles. Just think! The worst enemy is one who strikes in numbers, not alone. In the taiga, for instance, the hunter's liable to bring dozens of bears to heel one by one, and then fall victim to a swarm of mosquitoes. I'm not trying to defend my idea. It's only my personal opinion."

The girl sat in deep reverie. She had herself often thought about the same thing, and a vague fear stirred in her young soul of the endless multitude of day-to-day trifles.

"It's true that trifles often get the better of us," she said, "but isn't there a way of surmounting them?"

"Yes and no," he replied, "it all depends."

Privalov got to know Dr. Sarayev who sometimes whiled the evenings away with Vasily Bakharev. He was a stocky gentleman of about fifty, broad-shouldered, short-necked, and with abundant streaks of grey in his smooth dark hair and beard. He was extremely well preserved for his age, and only his face, like that of all high-strung people, was pale. His small black eyes were sheltered under thick eyebrows, looking out keenly and pensively. The doctor had a hasty, soundless way of walking, and a firm grip when shaking hands. His smile was the stereotyped medical smile which no one could really fathom.

"My teacher and friend," Nadine introduced him. "The doctor remembers you, Sergei, when you were still a schoolboy."

"I haven't forgotten you either," Privalov replied, "and would even have recognized you if I had met you in the street."

"I could scarcely say the same," the doctor uttered in a soft, throaty voice, examining Privalov closely. "And no wonder. You've turned man now, while I've turned grey. It seems only yesterday that you and Konstantin were

mere boys, and Nadine a tiny tot. Yet it was fifteen years ago, and we, old men that we are, can only make way for you, the younger generation."

"You seem to be out of sorts today, doctor," Nadine said with a smile.

"Not at all. Just stating facts. It's one of those old stories that's ever new."

Privalov listened to the doctor attentively. He wanted to see the tutor under whose influence Nadine had developed, but could not, to his sorrow, find any trace of what he sought.

"How did you like the doctor?" Nadine wanted to know after the doctor's departure. "Did his civility and his eternal smiles create a bad impression? He's incorrigible that way, but he's a remarkable man for all that. You'll like him immensely once you get to know him better. I don't want to overpraise him, though, lest it spoils your impression."

## X

Privalov could no longer put off his visit to Lyakhovsky and one fine morning set out to pick up Polovodov. But the latter was out and Privalov was on the point of returning home, his conscience appeased for having tried.

"Why hurry, Sergei Alexandrovich?" Antonida's voice reached him. "My husband will be back soon."

Antonida stood in the doorway of the guest-room in a light-blue negligee adorned with a profusion of lace, trimmings and bows. Her long golden hair was deftly gathered in a homely kind of hairdress, and a string of amethysts sparkled on her neck. She smiled, narrowing her eyes somewhat in the fashion of theatrical ingénues.

"Are you afraid of the prospect of spending a boring half-hour with me? But I'll make you atone for it and for

your lack of tact, and kill a whole hour. Oh yes, my husband left orders to let him know at once if you should call in his absence. He's at the bank. But I'll send the messenger in an hour, not a minute earlier. Frightened, aren't you?"

She laughed gaily and took Privalov to a small light-blue guest-room. Passing through the hall, Privalov caught a glimpse of the grand piano and asked:

"I seem to have interrupted your playing?"

"Nonsense. I'm not good at it. Here, sit down," she replied, pointing to an armchair next to her own. "Well, tell me how you spend your time. Oh yes, I think I met you the other day in the street, and you pretended not to notice me. You even looked the other way. Now don't try to tell me you're short-sighted. Lying is a sin."

"Heaven forbid," Privalov exclaimed, taken aback by his hostess's extraordinary cordiality. "I remember the street I was walking in the other day, but I'm sure I didn't see your carriage. You're mistaken."

"No, I'm not."

"At least name the street where you saw me," Privalov insisted.

"Ah, you want to catch me, eh?" Polovodova chuckled coyly, patting the arm of her chair. "You want to catch me in a lie. Well, I saw you at the end of Nagornaya Street on your way to the Bakharevs. I realize, of course, that you were too preoccupied to look either way."

"Really?"

"Ha-ha, Sergei Alexandrovich, I was only joking. I had a tooth-ache and stayed home all day."

An hour passed unnoticed. The hostess's gay mood was contagious, and Privalov caught himself laughing at all the delightful nothings usually said in pretty little guest-rooms. Antonida brought out her album of photographs to show him a portrait of Zosya Lyakhovskaya. While looking through the album and groping vainly in his mind

for something witty to say about Zosya's picture, Privalov heard Polovodov's footsteps in the adjoining room; Antonida edged furtively away from her visitor.

"He's my prisoner!" Antonida explained to her husband, pointing at Privalov. "When Sergei Alexandrovich learned you weren't in, he wanted to make his get-away unnoticed. I punished him by keeping him here a whole hour in my company."

"I see you were in a tight spot," Polovodov remarked, cheerfully kissing his wife's forehead. "I shouldn't have cared to be in your place."

"But I enjoyed myself thoroughly," Privalov assured him.

"Well, to console poor Sergei Alexandrovich I showed him a picture of Mademoiselle Lyakhovskaya." Antonida's eyes sparkled impishly.

"Splendid," Polovodov observed. "All we have to do now is go, or rather drive, from the photograph to the original. You'll excuse us, Tony dear, we're going to visit Lyakhovsky."

"I know," she replied.

"I thought you had been to Lyakhovsky's without me," Polovodov said to Privalov on their way to the hall. "It's been weeks, and you didn't show up. I meant to call on you myself today."

"How dense you are, Alexander," Antonida put in archly. "Sergei Alexandrovich had his hands full all the time."

Polovodov pretended not to catch the hint, while Privalov experienced a kind of silly sensation. In the door Polovodov again kissed his wife, and the picture of the happy couple would have touched even a stone heart. Nobody could have thought for a moment that the touching parting was just another scene in the act of devoted man and wife. We have to note, however, that the act was by no means a crude conspiracy. No, it was simply a

tacit agreement which sprang quite naturally from the morning scene already known to the reader. And strangely enough, after visiting her *maman*, who opened her bewildered daughter's eyes with true worldly tact, Antonida even felt fresh respect for her husband who gave her something to strive for.

## XI

The Privalov mansion was at the other end of the same Nagornaya Street in which the Bakharevs had their domicile. It was built on the top of a hill and from afar looked much like an ancient kremlin. Several large white buildings with columns, belvederes, balconies and strangely-shaped cupolas faced a moderately large square. A magnificent gateway shaped as an *arc de triomphe* opened upon Nagornaya Street. A whole series of stone service buildings, likewise adorned with columns, stucco cornices and arabesques, was strung out down Nagornaya hard by the main building. An openwork iron gate afforded a view of the large yard surrounded on all sides by outhouses, stables and a magnificent hothouse. All in all, it was a veritable castle, built in the taste of the feudal nobility; an old park stretched beyond it, its green alleys running all the way down the hillside. Privalov was struck by the same sad picture of desolation and waste which he had seen at the Poluyanovs', Kolpakovs' and Razmakhnins'. The mansion was a magnificent ruin; the cornices had crumbled, the rust-eaten corroded roof had come loose in strips, the massive columns had long since peeled and their brickwork had come to light under the plaster. Half of the house was unoccupied and stared sadly upon the world with its blackened, frameless windows. In places the roof and walls had been freshly painted. One part of the house was occupied by Lyakhovsky, and a large wing housed the offices. The hothouse and

service buildings had long been turned into storehouses for vodka and alcohol. Privalov's heart bled at the sight of all this decay. He wanted to turn and run back to his three cosy little rooms and spare himself this scene of decadence. As Polovodov's carriage, rattling faintly, drew up before the impressive portal, the heavy oak door was flung open and the whiskered, smiling countenance of Palka, the doorman, appeared on the threshold.

"Is your master at home?" Polovodov asked, running up the steps into a dark reception-hall.

"Yes, sir," Palka reported, standing respectfully at attention. He was a giant with a plump face in the style of traditional Polish servitors.

The hall was like a minister's reception-room, with a lavishly carpeted mosaic marble floor, oak-panelled walls, the ceiling covered with arabesques, and an ornate stairway of white marble with massive bronze banisters. A living wall of exotic vegetation was strung out in pots on both sides of the stairway, and below, perched on marble pedestals, stood bronze Tritons with raised tails, supporting miniature cupids who held heavy opaque lamps in their raised plump hands.

"Alfons Bogdanich is in there with the master," Palka warned, helping Polovodov and Privalov out of their overcoats.

"Alfons Bogdanich is Lyakhovsky's manager," Polovodov told Privalov as they ascended the stairs.

From afar Privalov heard a strange yelling, as of market-wenchs quarrelling; high-pitched notes intruded importunately upon the ear. Catching his questioning look, Polovodov uttered with a placid smile:

"The usual story. Lyakhovsky quarrelling with his manager. Ha, ha. It's nothing really. Yet they can't live a day without each other."

When they reached the second landing, Polovodov turned to the door leading into Lyakhovsky's study-room.



It was from here that the noise of verbal battle issued, as Privalov had the opportunity to ascertain.

"Come in, Sergei Alexandrovich," Polovodov said, flinging the door open.

Lyakhovsky was seated in an old leather armchair, his back to the door, but this did not prevent him from seeing those who entered his study. For that he had merely to raise his eyes to the mirror on the wall facing him. This mirror alone, among the rest of the furnishings, spoke of a certain habit for luxury; everything else struck the eye with its inordinate modesty, even a hint of squalor. The wall-paper was a faded blue; the ceiling had long turned a dirty grey, and there were cobwebs in the corners; the parquet floor was badly worn and covered with a shabby, lacklustre carpet which, from a distance, looked like a large soiled blotch. Several old chairs, two small tables in the corners, and a low oil-cloth sofa to the right of the writing-desk made up the furnishings. The writing-desk was littered with paper and account-books of all sizes and hues, artfully concealing the torn cloth and the cracked nut panelling.

Lyakhovsky's own appearance was in harmony with that of his study. His small meagre frame, much as the carpet under his feet, appeared from afar like a dirty blotch, with the one difference that it was perched in a shabby armchair. Although it was summer, the inner of the double frames, blackened and dusty, had not been removed from the windows, and the master himself was in an old quilted overcoat. A scarf was wrapped round his gaunt neck. One could scarcely tell his age. He belonged to that category of people, petrified and withered like old toothpicks, whose age was incalculable. The all-destroying wheel of time seemed to roll by, missing them. They did not change for years and years, like those old, decayed tree-stumps held together by their bark alone, ready to crumble to dust at the slightest touch. Lyakhov-

sky's large scull was closely invested in parched, yellow skin, furrowed with numerous small, deep wrinkles near the eyes. When he smiled the wrinkles radiated over his whole face. He wore a moustache, and a tiny tuft of a beard under his lower lip; his black hair, profusely streaked with grey, formed a funny kind of forelock. Blue spectacles saddled his humped nose, but he rarely looked through them, usually over them, so that it was hard to tell from afar in which direction he was looking. Only the eyes were alive in his wrinkled face. They were dark and lustrous, betokening the reserve of vital power still miraculously enclosed in his parched frame. Alfons Bogdanich was Lyakhovsky's very opposite. He was fat, his neck was fat, so was his head, and his red fingers—a stump of a man, his little pig's eyes darting shiftily on both sides of his fat nose.

"You want to clean me out," Lyakhovsky raged in his feminine voice. "No, no, a thousand times no! I won't let you make a fool of me!"

"Compose yourself," Alfons Bogdanich replied quietly, fingering the counters of an abacus.

"You're digging my grave and telling me to compose myself?" Lyakhovsky screamed back. "My grave, I say! And with Privalov here, in Uzel. You know perfectly well he'll come any day now, sticking his nose into the accounts. You'll be out of it."

"You don't have long to wait. He's here already," Polovodov interrupted him loudly. "I have the honour to introduce Sergei Alexandrovich Privalov."

"Akh, a thousand pardons," Lyakhovsky stammered, turning and stretching out his withered hand. "Awfully glad to see you. I meant to call on you myself, but there was so little time. Always so much to do. Have to work like a convict."

Privalov mumbled a reply, fixing his eyes on the wretched little frame of the Uzel magnate with badly

disguised surprise. The Lyakhovsky he had pictured to himself was gone, totally outdone by the real Lyakhovsky, who surpassed anything he ever imagined, considering the stories of his uncommon greed and oddity. Some people's appearance shatters all possible impressions of them made by proxy, and Lyakhovsky was one of them.

"You've come at the right time," Lyakhovsky went on, rolling his head like a China doll. "You've heard what an uproar that boy, your brother, has caused. Yes. I'm absolutely shaken. Professor Tideman is a man of irreproachable integrity. I have the best possible recommendations. Alfons Bogdanich and I have just gone through some accounts, and we can come right down to business. Especially since Polovodov's here as well. I'm so awfully glad to see you, so awfully glad. We can start right in."

Privalov thought with a smile: "The chap's not wasting any time." He seated himself in Alfons Bogdanich's place, the latter having slipped quietly out of the room.

Much against his will, Polovodov also seated himself at the desk, stretching his spindly legs. He looked at Lyakhovsky and Privalov, as much as to say: "Well, friends, what are you going to do now, I'd like to know?" Lyakhovsky produced a stack of papers and account-books, pushed his spectacles up on his forehead and said gravely:

"D'you smoke, gentlemen? I had some excellent cigars somewhere."

He dived nimbly into his desk, pulled out an empty cigar-box, flipped its bottom with his finger and said with the smile of a doctor whose patient just died:

"There were a hundred of them. Excellent cigars. Verryovkin smoked them all. He smokes two at a time, you know." He turned the box bottom up, and added sadly, "Not a single one left."

"Don't bother," Polovodov reassured him with a merry twinkle in his eye. "I've brought some with me."

"And I've some, too," Privalov remarked, amused by Lyakhovsky's behaviour.

"Splendid," Lyakhovsky breathed with relief. "Splendid. I love the smell of good cigars. Yours are regalias, I suppose. Very good. Veryovkin smokes too much."

After this little episode Lyakhovsky impulsively attacked the papers lying before him. He knew his business well. An artful diplomat, he presented the weak points first, and instantly buried them in a deluge of figures, whole columns of figures, average figures for the previous three years, and for the previous five, and comparative figures of incomes and outlays, and analogies in figures, and estimates, plans and assessments; figures simply piled up. It seemed Lyakhovsky wanted to fill the room with them. Privalov followed the numerical fireworks with attention, until at last his head began to reel and he was ready to confess that the torrent of figures had overwhelmed him. Seeking respite, he asked Lyakhovsky:

"I was told you have a rough copy of the latest trustees' report—I'd like to look at it."

"Yes, of course," Lyakhovsky replied. "Of course, I have it. I'll gladly show it to you."

He ran up to the window with soft mincing steps, rummaged about in several boxes, and then, glancing out of the window, pushed the boxes away.

"You'll excuse me a minute," he said and instantly rushed out of the study. They heard him through the half-open door dashing down the stairs and cursing the dozing Palka in passing.

"Have a look, Sergei Alexandrovich. Ha, ha!" Polovodov laughed, leading Privalov to the window. "An amazing personality."

Polovodov opened part of the window, and again Privalov heard the high-pitched sounds which they had

heard some time before. Lyakhovsky was attacking the massive figure of Ilya, the coachman, who faced his master with a bare head. A brand-new broom lay at their feet on the ground, and Lyakhovsky was trampling upon it furiously.

"You want to ruin me, all of you!" the miser screamed at the top of his thin voice. "You had a new broom just two days ago, didn't you? I saw it with my own eyes. You did, you did, you did!"

"It's still there, in the stable," the coachman replied imperturbably, raising his hand to the place where other people have their necks, and where he, Ilya, had a fold of fat, like a rhinoceros's, overflowing the collar of his calico shirt. "I didn't take it. I have no use for it."

"Yes, yes. A broom today, a broom tomorrow, and then another broom. Good heavens! You'd just as well take the shirt off my back, I know. D'you think I have mountains of gold? Eh? Mountains? What did you have in the sack I saw you carry across the yard earlier today?"

"Oats. Just ordinary oats."

"I know it wasn't water. But what did you want with the oats, eh?" Lyakhovsky inquired. "Oats cost money. You steal them, eh?"

"May I never leave this spot, master, if I do," Ilya retorted. "The miss wanted me to feed Teck. You mustn't think I steal them. It's bad stealing oats—may I never leave this spot. Ask the miss."

"The miss! I know perfectly well what you're up to," Lyakhovsky screamed. "Mind you, I'll ask the miss anyway."

Lyakhovsky raged on for a few minutes, demanded that Ilya put the new broom away, and returned to the study with beads of cold sweat on his forehead.

"They're ruining me," he groaned hollowly, dropping wearily into the armchair and shutting his eyes.

"Seems to me you're taking trifles too closely to heart," Polovodov observed, lighting a cigar.

"Trifles? Trifles, you say?" Lyakhovsky roared, jumping to his feet as though fired out of a gun. "What aren't trifles? They took a new broom two days ago, and want another one today."

"But a broom isn't worth more than a kopek," Polovodov argued.

"Ah, young man," Lyakhovsky reasoned, "it isn't the broom that worries me. It's their attitude, d'you understand—the attitude of my employees. It's the way they treat my money. Yes. I should have been a pauper long ago if I looked at my money through their eyes. What I want is consistency. Yes, consistency! Particularly in trifles, for life is made up of them. If I let off Ilya today, the other coachmen will do the same tomorrow. They'll steal everything they can put their hands on. It's the method—the idea, that's important; who doesn't see to his kopeks will never save a million. That's particularly true of me. I'm so terribly busy, and I have so many employees and servants. They'd nibble away everything it took me years to amass."

"Excuse me, Sergei Alexandrovich," Lyakhovsky added after a brief pause, "let's get back to work."

"Perhaps you're tired," Privalov uttered. "Maybe some other time."

"Oh, no. Why? Method and consistency are important in everything one does."

The trustees' report took up more than an hour. Privalov checked some of the figures in the books and found them in perfect order. Now he had only the accounts to see. Lyakhovsky opened them and was about to plunge again into the realm of figures.

"No, gentlemen," Polovodov pleaded, rising from his chair, "I've had enough. I'll go mad—mad! Sergei Alexandrovich, have pity."

"It's all the same to me," Privalov replied. "It's up to our host."

"Well, then, stay with him," Polovodov declared. "I'm of no help, and beg to be let off."

"Where will you go?" Lyakhovsky asked with annoyance. "I can't understand it."

"There's nothing to understand. It's all very simple," Polovodov replied. "Go on with your work. I'll take a rest. I'll call on your daughter."

Lyakhovsky glared helplessly at Polovodov's back as the latter was leaving the room, then fixed his eyes intently on Privalov who was waiting coolly to resume their business. Privalov was no longer conscious of the strange study, or of its even stranger master, and of his odd manners. He seemed to have grown accustomed to them rapidly. So far he had gained only a very vague idea of the true state of affairs. It would take at least a month to go through all the papers and account-books. For the moment he only wanted to learn Lyakhovsky's methods and gain an insight into his notorious consistency. Vasily Bakharev had told him about the weak points in the trusteeship, but it was still too early to tackle them; if he did, Lyakhovsky would take his bearings at once and change his tactics accordingly, while, as matters stood, he was obliged to commit himself in one way or another. In this game Privalov had the advantage of being an enigma to Lyakhovsky.

"A case of the babe and the devil," Polovodov grumbled, striding down the corridor with the assurance of a frequent visitor. "I can well imagine how little Privalov makes out of it all. Ha, ha!"

Along the way Polovodov encountered a pretty housemaid in a white lace-trimmed apron; she was balancing a silver tray of empty coffee cups.

"Is the young miss alone?" Polovodov asked, blocking her way and trying to pinch her dimpled chin.

"Oh, really," the girl whispered archly, resisting the caress with the help of her tray. "Victor Bakharev and Lepyoshkin are with her."

"You little imp," Polovodov nodded.

After patting the maid's rosy cheek, Polovodov went on in high spirits; a pretty face never failed to stir a pleasant warmth in him.

## XII

The auditing in Lyakhovsky's study was interrupted by the host himself; he felt unwell, and opened a slit in the window.

"Let's put it off," Privalov suggested.

"Oh, no, no! We'll carry on today," Lyakhovsky insisted, adding briskly, "We'll take a little walk, eh? A bit of fresh air will do us good. Don't you want to see the house?"

"I'm afraid a walk will tire you."

"On the contrary, it'll do me good."

Privalov followed submissively in his host's wake, who led him to the landing, and from there into a large, high-ceilinged reception-hall. Eight massive grey marble columns with bronze bases and heads supported a large gallery which had ample room for fifty musicians. The ceiling, shaped like an elongated oval to improve the acoustics, was adorned with faded cupids and lush garlands of gaily-coloured flowers. An old-fashioned bronze chandelier hung suspended like a massive grey cocoon. The walls, stencil-painted, were cracked, and in places rain-water had left streaks of rust running down from the ceiling. The gold of the heads and bases, and of the cornices and arabesques, was faded, and in places entirely washed away. The parquet was deformed by the dampness, and bulged, as though swollen. The time-worn brocade curtains on the huge windows let in



but little light. A close, musty smell seemed to be part of all this slowly disintegrating magnificence.

"The hall's absolutely empty," Lyakhovsky explained. "We have little use for it in this small town. It would be much too costly to maintain. I can quote a few figures, if you like."

"Some other time, perhaps," Privalov put in.

Lyakhovsky showed him a few more rooms, which were in the same picturesque state of decay. In all of them he saw old-fashioned redwood furniture with bronze incrustations, expensive vases of Siberian jasper, marble and malachite, and bad paintings in heavy gilded frames. The effect all this magnificence had on him was depressing. It was doubly disagreeable and burdensome, first, because Privalov thought of the people who had gone to any length to build up this useless semblance of a palace, wretched for its lack of taste, and, secondly, because of the thought that he, of all people, was the sole heir to all this opulence. A sense of pity stirred in him for those who were his kin and perished under the insupportable burden of this monstrous luxury. There had been extraordinary men among them, shrewd men with a will of iron—and they had striven just for this, this pile of rubbish in a few rooms! In vain did Privalov search for a spot where he could rest his eyes from the incongruous, tawdry waste which was decomposing under the force of its own weight. There was no spot anywhere in these sumptuous chambers which could revive even a hint of childhood sentiment in him, the sentiment that was the birthright of even the most wretched pauper. Every single object in these rooms only brought back to mind the horrors they had witnessed. All these apartments adjoining the famous Privalov stables and sectarian chapel served to revive the shades of the notorious Sashka, of Styosha, and his father.

"We air the rooms no more than once or twice a year," Lyakhovsky explained. "We held a few balls in them. You won't believe it, but the candles alone cost more than a hundred rubles!"

"We've only to see the belvedere now," Lyakhovsky continued, running nimbly up a rotten, swaying staircase to the third floor.

Privalov took a deep breath of fresh air when they emerged on a balcony which commanded a fine view of Uzel, its environs, and the massive outline of the Ural Mountains stretching far to the south. True, the mountains were not particularly high, and formed something of an elbow—the bed of a lively little mountain stream, the Uzlovka, which derived its name from the abrupt curve it described on reaching the valley, a curve the Russians call "uzel," or "knot." The township, in its turn, derived its name from the stream, its thousands of houses and huts strung out in regular wide streets along both of its banks.

The view of the town was altogether pleasing. There were trim gardens and vividly painted churches. It was a lively little Siberian town and had little or nothing in common with its counterparts in Russia. Life brimmed over the edge here at every step. Up to a dozen large factories were scattered in the thick pine forests encircling the town in a broad belt, and the summer houses of the local magnates were strung out picturesquely down the Uzlovka banks. Privalov kept looking to the south-east, beyond Mokhnatenky Hill, where the undulating plain, descending gradually to the blessed steppes of Bashkiria, merged with the hazy horizon.

"Lively little town, isn't it?" Lyakhovsky asked, squinting his eyes in the sun. "I daresay, you didn't recognize it."

"I didn't. It had faded from my memory in fifteen years."

"Wait till they build the railway to Uzel. We'll really flourish then," Lyakhovsky observed.

Privalov kept silent.

"Now I'll show you the half which we occupy," Lyakhovsky was saying as they descended the stairs.

They passed an enfilade of occupied rooms, which were a pleasant contrast to what Privalov had seen before. The rooms were inhabited in the full sense of the word, evidencing the presence of life and living people. Even the disorder that reigned in them was pleasing after the ostentatious antechamber and the wretched study-room, to say nothing of the decaying magnificence of the halls—pleasing simply because it spoke of the presence of human beings; a book left lying on a table, an abandoned piece of sewing, a broad-rimmed straw hat with a plain field flower pinned to it, even the air itself seemed full of life, betokening an invisible presence, the presence of a woman who had caused all this disarray and had put the sweet-smelling summer flowers on the window-sills. Privalov was so fatigued with everything he had seen and heard that morning that he paid little attention to the chambers they passed.

### XIII

"Come in here, Sergei Alexandrovich," Lyakhovsky said, motioning to a verandah.

The verandah was shielded from the sun by a marquee, with summer vines forming a living wall on both sides of it. Hops, nasturtiums and sweet peas climbed upwards along closely strung wires. Lyakhovsky dropped in exhaustion into a wooden garden chair and said, pointing at the yard with his eyes:

"My daughter Zosya."

He could scarcely have chosen a better moment to show his daughter in all the brilliance of her unusual beauty.

She was some twenty paces away, dressed in a dark-blue riding-habit with a very long train. Strands of yellow-tinted golden hair peeped from under her blue hat whose brim was bent back *à la Rubens*. Privalov gazed attentively at the famous beauty with an eye somewhat prejudiced for this very fame, and could not help admitting that Zosya was scintillatingly beautiful. She belonged to that rare, undefinable type which defied description, like a delicate, rare aroma, or an exquisite melody. Words were powerless, just as powerless as paints and marble.

"Is he really her father?" Privalov thought to himself, turning to Lyakhovsky, a veritable moth-eaten dummy with half-closed eyes.

Zosya was not alone. Polovodov stood by her side in his grey overcoat, body leaning forward, like a swimmer about to dive. At her other side was Victor Bakharev, his hat pushed back and goatee sticking cockily upward, and Lepyoshkin in his caftan. The latter was smiling, and his smile virtually blotted out his little gimlet eyes. Every time Zosya addressed him he jerked his plump hands ludicrously. There was another young man in the group, Lyakhovsky's only son David, a youth with a thin sallow face and spindle legs that seemed to buckle as he walked. His hand clasped a long English riding-crop. David had made an early acquaintance with Victor Bakharev, Ivan Veryovkin and Lepyoshkin, and his father had long since given him up for lost.

"Shorten the cord, Ilya," Zosya commanded. In the middle of the yard a magnificent bay thoroughbred pacer was making regular rounds on a long cord. Ilya stood in the centre. His monstrous arms, matched only by those of sculptures of antique heroes, were bared to the elbows. The horse tried to drag him off the spot, but he bent his knees, and would not be budged.

"Watch that horse," Lyakhovsky said to Privalov. "He's a true-blue Tekin pacer worth six hundred rubles in

Khiva. It cost just about as much to bring him here, to the Urals."

"A splendid animal," observed Privalov, who had a good eye for horses.

"You should see Teck under a ladies' saddle," Lyakhovsky bragged.

"Here, Teck, here," Zosya shouted, stopping the horse.

Teck tossed his head and pawed the ground with his forelegs, arched his smooth neck and approached the girl coyly, placing his glorious intelligent head on his mistress's shoulder.

"Shouldn't spoil the horse, miss," Ilya muttered, scratching behind his ear with the end of the cord. "He's a regular tiger. Tries kicking me or sinking his teeth into me when I bring him fodder."

"Why didn't he *kick* the riding master?" asked Zosya.

"The riding master? He got a better salary, but I think I could ride no worse," Ilya replied.

Teck was allowed to go back to his stable, while the little group followed the hostess noisily into the house. Lepyoshkin alone hung back a bit and tried to make a get-away.

"What are you up to?" Zosya asked in surprise.

"Well, miss, I can't stay. Some other time, perhaps, if you'll be good enough."

"Why not now? D'you have some other engagement?" Zosya insisted.

"Why—no," he replied.

"He's scared out of his wits by the sight of your father," Polovodov explained, casting a look at the verandah.

"Oh, so that's it!" Zosya laughed. "Don't you know the proverb that 'Bad guest reckons without his host'?"

"I—I do," Lepyoshkin replied, squinting his eyes. "But I also know another one."

"Well, say it," Zosya ordered.

"Well, our fathers used to say, 'Guests must reckon with their host for they sit where they're told and the host, like a boil, sits where he pleases.'"

Zosya laughed hilariously until the tears streamed down her cheeks, and Privalov was reminded of Victor Bakharev's story of how he taught Zosya to catch flies. Victor and David took Lepyoshkin in tow and dragged him up the stairs.

"Holy cats, my—my lumbago," Lepyoshkin groaned, making a futile attempt to free himself. "It's a waste of energy. *Papa* will come and kick the lot of us out."

#### XIV

"Have lunch with us, Sergei Alexandrovich," Lyakhovsky said, adding that he himself never had lunch and would turn Privalov over to his daughter's care.

They entered the dining-room just as the little group trooped in through another door. Zosya smiled and gave Privalov her little hand, showing him to a place by her side.

"I'll leave you now, Sergei Alexandrovich; you'll excuse me—I've got things to do," Lyakhovsky said, sliding out of the room.

"Yes, excuse *papa*, he's always so busy," Zosya chimed in archly. "Why are you laughing, Lepyoshkin?"

"He's glad your father's gone," Polovodov remarked, watching Privalov closely.

"Right," Lepyoshkin grinned. "He'd have made the food stick in my throat. Begging your pardon, Zosya, your father is a clever man but awfully poor company."

"Well, at least you have the courage to speak your mind," Zosya chuckled.

"Does that mean you love me for my courage? Ha-ha-ha," Lepyoshkin guffawed, waving his arm.

The strange assemblage and the young hostess roused Privalov's curiosity. The tenor of their speech, their treatment of one another, the hostess's manners, were all new to him. Zosya behaved with aristocratic simplicity, treating everyone alike. She questioned Privalov like an old friend back from a long journey. Polovodov tried hard to put in a few funny remarks, but Zosya feigned indifference to both the witticisms and to their author. At first Polovodov ignored her attitude, but soon took offence and fell silent. It seemed to him that Zosya was giving him up for the Privalov fortune. In the final analysis he had little or nothing against it, but he did not want it to happen in the presence of the uncouth Lepyoshkin and of Victor Bakharev.

"What about the children's editor?" Zosya asked, nodding her head towards the silent Victor.

"It seems he's out of sorts," someone remarked, and Polovodov, reassured by the alarmed look of his hostess, said, "Victor has given up his editorship. From now on he's simply Moses."

"Why Moses?" the hostess asked.

"Lepyoshkin will tell you," Polovodov observed.

"Well, it's a long story," the worthy began. "Ivan Veryovkin, Lomtev, Nicolas, myself, Victor and your brother David—we were at the 'Golden Anchor' in a third-floor suite. There was wine of course. One thing led to another. Victor said there was no one to match his courage. It was just his way of blowing his own trumpet, but old Veryovkin took him at his word. Prove it, he said. The only feat possible in a hotel room is busting the mirror or breaking the furniture. But Victor's hard as nails—and Veryovkin goaded him on. 'Lower me out of the window to the cornice,' he shouts, and says that he'll walk all round the building along the ledge with a bottle in him. I tried to make the young idiot see reason, but he practically pulled my beard out. Go on, I said then, break

your fool neck. Old Vasily Bakharev will have fewer bills to pay. We tied several towels together and lowered him minus coat and waistcoat on to the cornice. God only knows how he found a foothold there. He raised the bottle to his lips when the watchman spied him from below. He took him for a lunatic or a thief, and let out a yell. 'Thieves!' he shouted. The uproar was terrific—police and all that sort of thing, but Victor wouldn't budge. We offered the towels to him, but he wouldn't climb back in. We brought a ladder—he didn't want it either. He'd come down in his own time, he said. Well, thought I, as you like—it's your own funeral. Meanwhile he grasps the cornice with his hands and crawls along it on all fours. God is my witness, he practically fell when he stumbled over a brick and smashed in a window. The din was fantastic. The window belonged to a suite occupied by an officer from Tashkent. The officer's seven daughters were asleep in the room. They jumped out of bed and rushed in what little they had on to their father's adjoining room. The father came running with a pistol, grabbed Victor by the leg and pulled him into the room like a cat. 'Who are you?' he asked, and Victor, unabashed, replied, 'Moses.' 'Where'd you come from?' the officer asked, and Victor said, 'From heaven.' All of us were quiet as mice, for fear the irate Tashkent father would take a pot-shot at us."

"How did the whole thing end?" Zosya asked, tears streaming down her cheeks from laughter.

"At the magistrate's, of course, with Nicolas acting as lawyer," Lepyoshkin concluded.

Victor chuckled with the others. David guffawed, and tried to reach Lepyoshkin under the table with his long legs.

"So we've lost an editor and found a Moses," Zosya observed when the shrieks of laughter abated.



After the boisterous lunch Privalov took leave of his hostess. As the door closed behind him Polovodov took Zosya aside and asked significantly:

"Well, Zosya, what d'you make of him?"

"Of Privalov? And you?"

"No, I'm serious. A man can never really fathom another man. A woman can. Mind you, it's very important—I depend on your acumen," Polovodov insisted.

"Good heavens! How mysterious you sound. What was the idea of sulking at lunch?"

"Oh, that was nothing. Does anyone really care about my feelings?"

"I resent your tone," Zosya declared, her face flaming. "You're going too far."

"I'm sorry," Polovodov stammered, kissing the girl's hand respectfully. "You know it happens to me sometimes."

They walked to another room and sat at a round table. Zosya made a grave face and her dark eyes fixed inquiringly upon her companion.

"You see, Zosya," Polovodov began quietly, "Privalov intends to start a lawsuit against us. Veryovkin's his solicitor."

"Nicolas?"

"Nicolas," Polovodov nodded.

A brief pause ensued.

Then Zosya asked, fingering the button on her glove:

"Well, what d'you want me to do?"

"I—I want to know your opinion of Privalov."

"My opinion? You know, there's something in Privalov's face. What it is I can't say just now—it may be secretiveness, perhaps, or persistence, or suspiciousness."

"Indeed, he's cleverer than he looks. But did you notice signs of weakness in his character? Some indecision in his looks, or some aimless gestures, perhaps? Privalov's the last of the Gulyayevs and

Privalovs. He is sure to have their family traits, such as an inclination to mysticism, and perhaps wilfulness, or morbid sensuousness. He's a degenerate, and the heritage of vice and failure must be stronger in him than the family virtues. That's a law of nature, although a good education and self-control may conceal it. After all, together with the family fortune Privalov must have inherited much of the family's depraved past."

"Sometimes," Zosya was quick to reply, fixing her eyes on Polovodov's inspired countenance, "sometimes you can be very clever and penetrating."

"That isn't much of a compliment, Zosya," Polovodov retorted, "but I mustn't be offended, because it's your presence that makes a fool of me."

"How touching—and funny," Zosya said. "Veryovkin says, quite rightly, that you love in seasons. Dark girls in spring, brunettes in winter, redheads in autumn, and since I have the misfortune of being a blonde, you honour me with your affections in summer."

"Enough, enough," Polovodov uttered crestfallen.

"Yes, indeed, we've digressed."

Polovodov paced up and down the room, rubbed his brow, and said:

"We may end up badly, Zosya."

"What exactly do you mean?"

"I shan't speak about myself—just about you. Your old man is sinking in deeper and deeper every day. I won't say that his stocks will fall on account of Privalov's lawsuit, but just picture it: one fine morning your father falls gravely ill, and what happens to you? He does not know his own affairs, and if there's any confusion your fortune may go up in smoke—or down the drain. It's the usual story with people of his kind."

"What's it to you?" Zosya replied challengingly. "If I should ever be a pauper, you'll have a better chance of success. But jokes aside, I've had enough of all your

business. It isn't bad to be wealthy, of course, but I won't be a slave to what I have."

There was something new in her eyes, her posture, the expression of her face. It was an entirely novel note, unlike her usual carefree air of a woman accustomed to adoration. Polovodov looked at the girl attentively. She smiled back strangely; it was a mixture of regret, pride and something Polovodov would have called "fishwifish" if it had been some other woman who smiled. Suddenly a thought flashed through his mind like lightning, and he asked with feigned indifference:

"Haven't seen Maxim here lately."

"No, he hasn't called for quite some time," Zosya replied coolly, with the same smile.

## XV

The Privalov mansion, a living reminder of stormy bygone days, was remarkable in itself, but what life there remained under its corroded roof was even more so.

Lyakhovsky was one of those mysterious men of whom there are so many in Siberia. He claimed to be a Ukrainian for some reason, but there was a rumour that he was the son of a Jew. He came to Siberia to make his fortune, which some ascribed to stolen gold, others to vodka, and others still to mere luck. All were manifestly agreed, however, that he was filling his pockets at the expense of the Privalov trusteeship. But it would be most proper to say that many diverse forces and strokes of luck had served as the creative elements of the Lyakhovsky ménage, and that these sprang from the man's uncommon talent of judging and using people like a chess player uses his pawns. Both the true source and the size of Lyakhovsky's wealth remained a mystery to the little township.

Thousands of stories made the rounds about his oddi-

ties and greed, and it would only be fair to say that most of them were essentially true. But, as often happens, people did not see further than the oddities and the greed, and failed to arrive at the root of the matter. To acquire for the mere sake of acquiring, had long since become a shell that had grown more and more solid with every year and gradually obliterated the living being in Lyakhovsky.

A word is here due about Lyakhovsky's wife, who was afflicted with a very Russian ailment—alcoholism. All methods of treatment, all the prodigies of the Russian and foreign medical world were powerless. And the worst thing about it was that she had passed her vice on to her children. Absorbed in his business affairs Lyakhovsky became aware of his son when it was altogether too late. David was a lost man, a debauchee and spendthrift, to whom, Lyakhovsky swore, he would not leave a single kopek of his fortune. Like Victor Bakharev, David was a mother's boy, and the two young men were drifting cheerfully towards a similar sad end. In both of them, man's most valued qualities—will and character—were paralyzed to an equal degree. The two were not evil, nor stupid, nor bad, but could be the one, the other and the third at any instant for their sheer lack of will.

In spite of all precautions the signs of a man's upbringing were manifest in Zosya's nature, and all her habits were more those of a young man than of a girl. She could not stand feminine company, and the exception she made for Nadine soon became invalid. The developments relating to the Privalov trusteeship injured the relations of Lyakhovsky and Bakharev. The latter never spoke badly of people, and could never have done so to his daughter because he drew a distinct line between business and everything else; but Nadine sensed the true turn of her father's mind with feminine intuition and gradually drew away from the Lyakhovskys. True,

it was scarcely perceptible on the surface, but it was there nonetheless, and Lyakhovsky was genuinely upset by this unfortunate development. We have already seen that the Lyakhovsky household entertained Lepyoshkin, and Victor, Nadine's brother, and many others, whom Lyakhovsky was constrained to wink at. It is true that Zosya was a prosaic creature scarcely given to sudden infatuations, for which reason neither the doctor nor Lyakhovsky himself was to any extent alarmed by the male company she kept.

"Thanks to our upbringing, doctor, Zosya has wires instead of nerves," Lyakhovsky would observe with a certain amount of satisfaction. "She's sooner a jockey than a miss. That's good. A woman is as human as a man, yet the upbringing she used to get turned her into a nervous doll. Am I right, doctor?"

The doctor usually had nothing to say to this, and Lyakhovsky would change his tone.

"What can I do?" he would ask, shaking his head sadly. "Blood means a lot, and there's so much bad blood in Zosya, so very, very much. Neither you nor I are to blame for it. I see that in many things she still lacks character, and will-power, and that makes her unfair and intractable. But tell me what else I can do for her? Send her abroad, perhaps—to America? But she'll fail to grasp even a tenth of what she'll see, and half-knowledge is worse by far than total ignorance. I can't be as impartial as I would like, being her father, and may be exaggerating her failings. I've read somewhere, in a trashy French novel I think, that there's nothing harder than putting the relations between father and grown-up daughter on the right footing. And this is made more difficult still by the fact that poor Zosya has no mother—no, worse, much worse than that, a mother who drinks! Isn't that so, doctor? Try to see my point, and tell me whether you'd do what I did."

## XVI

We had a glimpse of Lyakhovsky's better side just now, but he was an entirely different man when it came to money. At the close of every month there were invariable scenes in his study, such as this one: Ilya, the coachman, would squeeze his bulky frame through the door into the study and stop wordlessly near the threshold; he would scratch himself hesitantly where his thick head merged with a pair of the broadest shoulders. His gimlet eyes would be fixed on something in the corner, and he would shuffle his feet restlessly, like an elephant.

"What d'you want, Ilya?" the master would say in a tired voice.

"Salary, master."

"What?"

"The salary, master."

"You want money?" Lyakhovsky would ask.

"The salary, master."

"Money—money everywhere. Everybody wants money," Lyakhovsky would warm to the situation. "D'you think I mint it, do you?"

"Don't know, master."

"Don't know? Where'll I take it from? What d'you think of that? Eh? Or don't you ever think? You do, don't you? 'I'll come and ask the master for money'—that's what you think, and you expect the master to put his hand into the drawer and pull out as much money as you need. But, you dolt, money doesn't grow in the master's drawer!"

A convulsive twitch, which served in place of a smile, would streak across Ilya's bloated, bearded countenance, and his small black mole's eyes would disappear behind swollen red eyelids.

"If you think it's too much—the salary, I mean," he would say, shifting from one foot to the other, "you better

let me go. The Panafidins want me. They'll pay five rubles more."

"Who are the Panafidins?" Lyakhovsky would ask.

"Traders. Leather merchants."

"Traders? Well, go—go to the Panafidins if you can't get along here. Old Panafidin will get drunk at a funeral and smash your head in on the way home. That's all it'll come to. Just look at yourself—bursting with fat. Tell me, now, who's fed you so as you're ready to burst?"

"God's own will, master," Ilya reasoned, resuming the scratching at the back of his head. "Since the good Lord gave me good health. . . . You come across a horse sometimes that you feed and feed, and it only gets leaner. The master probably thinks his coachman eats the oats meant for the horse. But what about the salary?"

"You're a regular leech! Well, how much d'you want?"

"A month's salary, master—twenty-five rubles."

"Oh-oh-oh," Lyakhovsky would groan, raising his hands to his head. "Twenty-five! But a clerk doesn't get as much, a c-l-e-r-k! D'you understand? Fifteen rubles, ten, eight—that's all he gets. And he's of good birth, and wears a badge on his cap, and keeps his old mother, too. And look at you! Just look in the mirror—a muzhik, nothing else. A girdle and breeches—nothing more. Twenty-five rubles! Oh-oh-oh!"

"Well, hire a clerk to drive the coach," Ilya would argue, "and he'll do your Teck in, or Batir, for his eight rubles. Take Teck. He's a tiger. I give him oats and he tries to sink his teeth into me. One day he kept backing, and backing, and pushing me up against the wall. I was waiting for him to kick out. That would have been the end of me. Well, what about the sal. . . ."

"Here! Take it! Take it!" Lyakhovsky would shout in exasperation, pulling out the drawer, in which there were

several crumpled banknotes. "Here! Rob me of my last, you scoundrel."

"I'd rather you gave it to me," Ilya would utter.

"I can't. I know you'll throw it away on drink," Lyakhovsky would groan.

The scene recurred month after month. Ilya would approach the table warily, as though walking on ice, and would stick his paw into the drawer cautiously.

"Thank you," he would then say, backing out of the door with the grace of a rhinoceros. "As for me, I like serving you. The Panafidins' coachman came the other day and tried to talk me into leaving. There'd be a rise—and vodka; well, thanks."

Coachman Ilya was a regular parasite, but Lyakhovsky would not think of letting him go, because there was not a second Ilya in the whole gubernia—a fine coachman, and one who knew how to please Zosya.

To complete the description of Lyakhovsky's household, we must say a few words about Alfons Bogdanich and Palka. Alfons Bogdanich was the Christian name and patronymic of the little homeless Pole picked up by Lyakhovsky off the street. It seems he did not even know his own surname. But hardly anyone thought of that. Everyone was accustomed to the idea that Alfons Bogdanich knew everything, forestalled every wish, was always forewarned, knew how to please, and took the brunt of the punishment. No one ever gave it a thought, it seems, what the consequences would be if Alfons Bogdanich went on strike one fine day, or, which was much the same, would fail to rise at five in the morning, tour the household several times, berate the servants in two dialects, and then show up at his master's study to get his own share of invective and abuse; no one ever thought what the consequences would be if he did not sit up nights with his staff of twenty clerks, who jobbed away under his eagle eye without raising their heads from the



desk, and if, last but not least, Alfons Bogdanich had not had the happy gift of always being on the spot, of being in several places at once, of seeing and hearing everything, and of suppressing every untoward phenomenon within his reach. In short, Alfons Bogdanich played the same part in the household as a spring plays in a timepiece, but for all this Lyakhovsky thought him no more than helpful and patient. He regarded Alfons Bogdanich as something of a simpleton and raised him above the rest of his employees solely for his asinine patience and because he was absolutely alone in the world. The latter fact served as a guarantee that the man would not steal to enrich sundry nieces and nephews. Alfons Bogdanich's patience was indeed not of this world, but Lyakhovsky would have changed his opinion if he would ever have chanced to see what went on in Alfons Bogdanich's mind when he turned in after vespers, which he read devoutly like every good Catholic, coughing and groaning. It was very strange that Lyakhovsky, who had the genius of seeing through people, failed to see through a man who hung about him all day long, day in and day out. It is a question of psychology, perhaps the simplest kind of psychic short-sightedness of people unusually long-sighted outside their houses, who see no farther than their noses at home.

Palka was the very opposite of Alfons Bogdanich. He did nothing whatever all day long, and, strangely enough, enjoyed the reputation of a loyal servant. Alfons Bogdanich himself was powerless against him, just as he was powerless against Ilya. But Ilya was lazy because he was being spoilt by Zosya, and Palka, because he was a born good-for-nothing. Palka's position was very strong. No one ever thought of making the overfed servitor do anything but open doors and sort visitors into two categories: those who deserved attention, and those of whom he simply said "pkhe."

## XVII

"Well, how did you find Lyakhovsky?" asked Nicolas Veryovkin when he called on Privalov a few days later. "A beast in every way, isn't he? Ha-ha! I can imagine what a fool he played to impress you."

Privalov told him of his visit in minute detail. Veryovkin laughed uproariously over the story of the cigars and the broom, his guffaw reaching Victor Zaplatin's ears in the other half of the house; the latter started and mumbled: "Veryovkin's having a high time."

"He was his usual self," Veryovkin remarked, wiping the tears from his eyes. "Give him time and he'll pretend to be deaf and blind. I'll vouch for it! He's a scoundrel. He owns several houses here in Uzel, which he bought for next to nothing. One of them caught fire. The bells rang, and people came running to help put it out. Lyakhovsky walked all the way to the other end of town, where the fire was. The cabby had wanted fifteen kopeks and he had offered ten. The cabby wouldn't think of it. Later people asked Lyakhovsky why he grudged the cabby five kopeks and showed so little concern about the house. 'What could I have done if I arrived on the scene ten minutes earlier?' he said. 'The house would have burned down anyhow, and I'd have spent the five kopeks for nothing.' What diabolic self-control, eh? We've got to be sharp with that man! Let's see the books he gave you."

"Here they are," Privalov replied, producing a sheaf of papers he had brought with him from Lyakhovsky.

Veryovkin made himself comfortable in an armchair with a cigar between his teeth, and mounted a pince-nez on his nose. He only smiled when Ipat, the footman, brought a decanter of vodka and *hors d'oeuvres* on a glass platter, flattered by Privalov's ministrations to his perpetual thirst. He rummaged about in the papers, littering the table with them and making emphatic

notes on the margin with a red pencil. It was not easy to make head or tail of the mass of figures at first glance, and he packed half the papers into his voluminous brief-case with its torn straps and broken clasp.

"The devil himself would break his legs wading through this," he observed after an hour's arduous labours. "It will take at least a fortnight to go through the papers. That Alfons Bogdanich must have done his best to befog everything. But we'll get the better of them, I'll vouch, and tie them hand and foot. Just wait." Then he said in a different tone, leaning his massive frame against the back of the chair, "I dropped in to take you to Polovodov's. We'll have lunch there, and you feel him out a bit. We mustn't pick a quarrel with him as yet, that'll only delay the issue. The papers are in their hands, after all. What's more, I don't like quarrelling with my adversaries."

Privalov did not wish to visit the Polovodovs. He tried to refuse, but Veryovkin was firm and even handed him his hat.

"No, no, no. We must go," he insisted. "Antonida, incidentally, has brewed a new liqueur that'll make your mouth water. I know how much you like liqueurs. Don't deny it, the truth never hurts. Let's go at once, time doesn't wait. Hey, Ipat—help the master into his coat!"

Veryovkin chattered like a schoolboy all the way. His high spirits proved contagious. It was only when they passed the Bakharev house that Privalov felt a pang of remorse—remorse for no visible reason. He seemed to feel Marya Bakhareva's reproachful glance and mentally compared Nadine with Antonida, although the two were uncomparable.

The lunch at Polovodov's was duller than could have been expected, and Privalov was annoyed with himself for coming. Antonida was cold to him and, it seemed, somewhat sad. No mention was made of Lyakhovsky, as

he had expected, and he was surprised at Veryovkin's strange whim of bringing him to the Polovodovs to watch the pontifical servant serving the dishes and the host working vigorously with his jaws. It did not enter Privalov's thoughts that Veryovkin was only executing Antonida's orders, and yet it was so. Veryovkin had a flair for doing favours of that kind, because he never wondered what was behind them. He never even asked himself why Antonida should suddenly want Privalov that very day, and at no other time, whatever the obstacles. "Female whims," Veryovkin said usually if an explanation was required. The lunch was much like the previous one. Rare, artistically prepared dishes were consumed with devotion and washed down with expensive wine. After lunch the host took Privalov off to his study.

In the meantime, Nicolas Veryovkin, who was recovering from the after-effects of the immoderate meal, caught hold of his sister and dragged her to the piano.

"Sing the Volga song, Tony, darling," he pleaded. "For me. Pay no heed to Privalov. He's an excellent chap, though he may have a bee in his bonnet (Veryovkin raised his finger significantly to his forehead). Understand? He's a Slavophile of sorts. Ha-ha-ha! But that's nothing; every fool goes mad in his own little way."

"You seem to have enjoyed the lunch?" Antonida asked, looking lovingly at her brother.

"I was in my element—nothing more," he replied. "It's a wise man who drinks like me. There. Well, won't you sing for me, dear?"

Antonida ran her fingers over the keyboard and sang in her soft pure contralto voice:

*Far and wide the Volga spread,  
And reached the steep slopes of the bank....*

She sang the doleful song with the plain, hearty sentiment of the common people, quite unlike the man-

ner in which it is sung on the stage. She had the knack of drawing out the plaintful, sorrow-filled note which was part of all Russian songs, filled with mute tears and a mournful longing for freedom and unexplored happiness. Veryovkin sat back in the low settee, his huge head resting in the palms of his hands like a thing entirely superfluous to him. His tangled silken locks dropped over his forehead and eyes, but he made no move to brush them aside, his whole being suffused by a vague emotion which seemed to raise him like a tidal wave and carry him to the ends of the world. Privalov was about to say something to Polovodov when the first lines of the song reached his ears, and he remained open-mouthed.

"That's Tony," Polovodov replied to his unspoken question. "She's a fine ear for Russian songs—sings well when she's in the mood."

Polovodov, like Ivan Veryovkin, liked French love songs best, but in his capacity of Slavophile he made a dutiful display of emotion every time he heard his wife sing. Privalov's head reeled nostalgically at the sound of the song, and he shut his eyes to give himself up to his impression. Something stirred vaguely in him. Dim visions of a dense forest, a mighty river and a slowly sinking purple sun rushed through his head like a half-forgotten dream; there was the faint touch of a swiftly descending summer night, and the soft rustle of the riverside sedge grass, bending under the current.

"Breeding and stock come first in a woman," Polovodov observed, stretching his legs. "In the East women love in fits, somewhat too bluntly, bringing the whole thing down to just the animal aspect. A European woman is different. There isn't that licentious indolence, that wanton obscenity. In her presence all your nerves are on edge, your senses on the alert and your eyes

feast involuntarily upon her virtuously covered forms. Frequently, you take a woman for a girl. Everything builds upon artful surprises, and often torrid passions lurk under modestly lowered eyelids and childish, unformed curves. Which of the Bakharev girls d'you like better?"

Privalov had not heard what he said, and now looked up at him in bewilderment, unable to grasp the question. But Polovodov did not wait for an answer.

"I like Vera better," he said. "There's something untouched in her, she's the transition of yesterday's girl to tomorrow's woman. When that comes, everything will be over, because she'll start putting on airs. Let's go to the guest-room," he added, taking hold of Privalov's arm, as was his habit.

Polovodov did not stay long in the guest-room. He asked his wife to take care of their guest, excused himself to Privalov, promising to be back in a few minutes.

"You're abandoning Sergei Alexandrovich to an undeserved ordeal," Antonida said, rising from the piano.

"You're being unfair," Privalov could only reply. "I deem it a pleasure."

"Eh? What?" Nicolas asked, who had been napping on the settee. "I was so deeply touched that I dozed off. You're being nice to each other, it seems, eh?"

During the laughter that followed his words Polovodov made good his escape, and Privalov was left eye-to-eye with Antonida, for Veryovkin trudged off to the study, to "catch up" with his interrupted dream.

"What makes you think I try to avoid your company?" Privalov asked Antonida. "On the contrary, I listened to you sing with the greatest pleasure. Frankly, I've never heard anything like it."

Antonida looked attentively at her guest, wrapped the soft downy shawl closer about her, and observed with a languid smile:

"I can't understand why men always like to say the same thing over and over again. Can't they get along without compliments?"

They walked to the blue guest-room familiar to Privalov from his first visit, but this time Antonida took a seat very far away from her guest.

"You haven't told me about your visit to the Lyakhovskys," she began, shivering and drawing the shawl closer about her. "On second thought, don't tell me about it all. I know in advance that it's just as dull there as anywhere else. Isn't that so?"

"I don't know what you mean," Privalov observed.

"Oh, it's simple," she replied. "Look around you. It's dull and boring everywhere. Men kill time playing cards, and the women can't even do that. Sometimes I envy my husband, who escapes from the house and spends the day with Zosya. I hope he has a good time there—I don't ever try to hold him."

Privalov wanted to say something about entertainment, reading and business occupations, but Antonida suddenly interrupted him with a question:

"I say, when's your wedding?"

"What wedding?" he asked.

"Aren't you going to marry Nadine Bakhareva? The whole town's talking about it, and I must say I welcome it with all my heart. Nadine's a splendid girl, a serious and educated girl; she stands out to great advantage among all the others."

He replied, "Look here. I really respect Nadine very deeply, but the thought of marrying her never entered my head."

"Untrue," Antonida replied curtly.

"No, I mean it."

"All men usually say that, and then get married. Don't think I was sounding you out. No, I want to see you happy. That's all. Usually people envy others what they lack themselves. That's why I—my husband looks for entertainment away from me, and I can only derive pleasure from seeing other people happy."

"You're mistaken," Privalov pleaded, "I assure you. Certain circumstances stand—well, to cut a long story short, I won't ever marry."

Antonida measured Privalov with a long, attentive stare, but made no reply. She only wrapped the shawl still closer round her shoulders. Privalov had never seen her so beautiful. The song she had sung some time back still rang in his ears. And now this strange conversation. He suddenly experienced a sense of indescribable well-being from Antonida's proximity, and thrilled at the warmth of her fixed, indolent stare. The involuntary sadness that he sensed in her words was in harmony with his own none-too-happy mood, and he shook Antonida's hand warmly when making his departure.

In the evening of the same day, entering her mother's bedroom, Antonida looked tired and wretched. She sank heavily into a nearby chair, and spoke with a barely perceptible effort:

"He's a log, that Privalov."

Her mother looked at her inquiringly, and then replied calmly:

"Patience, dear child, patience."

"Has my husband been here?" Antonida asked.

"Yes. Just think of it! He took Oscar, and the two of them went to the Lyakhovskys. It isn't the first time they go there together."

"I can't make head or tail of it," Antonida replied.

"Nor I. But it's very, very strange indeed. What can that idiot Oscar want at Lyakhovsky's?" Agrippina observed, shrugging her shoulders contemptuously.



## XVIII

Nadine again paid frequent visits to the Lyakhovskys; Privalov saw her there whenever he and Lyakhovsky looked in at Zosya's during intervals in their work. There was always a noisy crowd of young people there, and Uncle Oscar, who could make even the most innocent joke sound funny.

"We'll call you uncle," Zosya said to him.

"Splendid idea," Oscar agreed. "I'll adore having a niece like you."

A *cavalier* of the old school, Uncle Oscar always kissed Zosya's hand respectfully, and had a funny way of clicking his heels. Polovodov acted the master-of-ceremonies, and had an inexhaustible supply of bright ideas—night boating on the Uzlovka, a picnic in the environs of Uzel, or fireworks in the old Privalov garden, and when those pastimes palled he would sit down to the piano and play. Strauss waltzes and the young people danced in the vaulted halls of the Privalov mansion. Victor Bakharev was Polovodov's right hand and carried out his every wish. Everybody laughed at Uncle Oscar, who was afraid of horses and water, and danced the waltz quaintly in two steps.

The fun was unexpectedly interrupted by a newcomer. One day, when Privalov and Lyakhovsky worked busily in the study, the old man pushed his spectacles to his forehead and remarked:

"Have you met Loskutov—Maxim Loskutov?"

"No," Privalov said.

"Well, you ought to; he's a unicum in his way. Yes, indeed. It's our doctor who dug him up. He has an amazing brain, and he's everything you might want—philosopher, scientist, poet. The devil only knows what he can't do! He's a highly gifted individual. I'm very grateful to the doctor for his gift."

Privalov laughed.

"What are you laughing at? He's a gift—what else? In Uzel we're all moss-grown. Now we take in an entirely new person, an erudite man with a unique mind and an amazing gift of gab. You should listen to him speak!"

Lyakhovsky made a sour face and spread his arms in a typically Jewish way.

"He's a find—that Loskutov," Lyakhovsky continued. "Our girls have never seen the real thing. Now they have him to look at, to learn from, and to blush before for their ignorance. Khe-khe! You should see them when Loskutov comes into the room; they fall silent in starry-eyed reverence. And no wonder. They're a bunch of provincial hens—chickens, I'd rather say—suddenly finding a real eagle among them. Have a look at him; he's Asia from tip to toe—a fatalist and a mystic."

"You've said so much about him," Privalov intervened, "that you've put my wind up."

"Well *he's* put *my* wind up," Lyakhovsky replied.

The old man rose from his armchair, tiptoed to the door to shut it, and whispered in Privalov's ear:

"Loskutov was mixed up in something. Get it? Some old sensational story. Indeed. He was exiled, then travelled all over the country and is now visiting here. He started a mining business in the Urals and is making good headway. If a man like him wanted to be rich, he'd have no trouble at all."

"But what's he like?"

"God knows," Lyakhovsky replied. "I think he's an ex-army man. Sometimes I worry that the girls will get ideas. They're young after all. But the doctor reassures me—and he's right. The greatest danger creeps up on you in the middle of the night, while in his case everything is above-board. At any rate, it's a good lesson to them. What d'you think?"

Before Privalov could reply Lyakhovsky suddenly burst out laughing and, holding his sides, ran up and down his study like a madman. Privalov had become accustomed to his strange antics and did not take offence. Choking with laughter, Lyakhovsky opened his mouth to speak, then waved his arm helplessly, and again laughed wildly. His spectacles jumped up and down on his forehead, thick blue veins appeared on his temples and tears welled up in his eyes. An attack of coughing cut short the fit, and gradually Lyakhovsky calmed down.

"Excuse me, Sergei Alexandrovich, ha-ha-ha," the old man groaned. "Just think. . . Ha-ha-ha! Just think! Polovodov! Ha-ha-ha! You know, he's a businessman of the modern school and a *bon vivant par excellence*. Suddenly he meets up with Loskutov. Ha-ha-ha! I've never seen anything like it! The same as putting a wolf and a dog in one cage. Polovodov, poor soul, is thrown into the shade. He's humbled in the dust. He's mad at Loskutov for being a thousand times cleverer, and the girls—the girls are having a wonderful time; they've caught the drift of things. It's a real school, I must say. Well, can you imagine? Polovodov, a splendid and winning chap in all respects, is convinced that Loskutov is nothing but a wretched adventurer, like the proverbial crow in a peacock's feathers."

"Has Loskutov been in the Urals long?" Privalov asked.

"Well, not exactly. A year or eighteen months—no more. Well, let's go, I'll introduce you to him. He's with Zosya."

Privalov was keyed up as they entered Zosya's guest-room, from which issued the sound of loud voices. Lyakhovsky was jogging along at the double, running his fingers through his hair. Privalov did not at first locate the person he wanted to see. He glimpsed Zosya on the tasselled blue atlas sofa, and Nadine at her side, sitting

on an atlas chair with a quilted back. The doctor was walking up and down the room smoking a cigar, hands clasped behind his back. Half-empty cups of cold coffee stood in disorder beside an open book on a table before the sofa.

"Maxim Loskutov," Lyakhovsky said in a high-pitched voice.

A man of medium height rose from the depth of a low blue armchair and offered Privalov his hand. He was about thirty-five, and his pale narrow face slightly touched with smallpox, his small, sparse beard, dense eyebrows and upturned nose made him unattractive. Only the large white forehead covered with a tangled mass of soft dark curls, and the tired, almost crushed look of his large eyes, whose outer corners were somewhat raised, lent his appearance a distinctive, characteristic touch. Faces like his are hard to forget. His small stocky frame and slow, tired movements spoke of great physical strength and vitality; his short muscular hand gripped Privalov's firmly, and his light-brown eyes, of a hue peculiar to southerners, fixed on Privalov's face, sizing him up. Loskutov's dark suit, covered in places with down and dust, and his wrinkled shirt testified to the tastes of their owner, who apparently had not changed his costume since his arrival.

"Well, I shan't interfere," Lyakhovsky said hurriedly, "I've got piles of work to do."

An oppressive silence set in for a minute or so and Privalov felt like an intruder in this intimate little circle.

"Like some coffee?" Zosya addressed him.

Privalov refused.

"I beg you, continue whatever you were doing," he observed, "that is, if I'm not in the way."

"No, no, not at all," Loskutov declared.

## XIX

In Lyakhovsky's study the host, Polovodov and Uncle Oscar were having a friendly talk. Polovodov was particularly garrulous. He shook Uncle Oscar familiarly by the shoulder and sought to banish all the doubts furrowing Lyakhovsky's brow. The latter was obviously undecided on some issue which Polovodov was pressing home, while Uncle Oscar stood aloof and only smiled tensely, looking just as rosy and cherubic as ever.

"What's there to worry about?" Polovodov insisted, spreading wide his long legs, as though this would help to drive home the argument.

"I'm not worried. No, not at all," Lyakhovsky replied, fidgeting in his armchair.

"Uncle Oscar knows *everything*," Polovodov finally said, seeking to eradicate all doubt with a single blow.

"What d'you mean? What d'you mean by 'everything'?" Lyakhovsky stammered miserably, shifting his eyes testily from Polovodov to Uncle Oscar. "It seems to me we had no special secrets."

Polovodov guffawed unnaturally, throwing back his head, then spoke with unconcern:

"Have no fears or doubts. You can be absolutely frank with Uncle Oscar. I've told him everything about the Privalov trusteeship."

These words struck their mark. Lyakhovsky, like a deflated balloon, hunched helplessly in his armchair. Uncle Oscar looked grave, and pursed his lips.

"Before telling *everything* to outsiders you'd have done well to ask my advice," Lyakhovsky muttered hollowly. "Perhaps I wouldn't want any outside interference. Perhaps I wouldn't agree to let anyone in on my affairs. Perhaps. . . ."

"Oh, don't play the fool," Polovodov interrupted angrily.

"You know me, and I know you. There's no point in putting on the mask."

"I won't have you speak to me like that," Lyakhovsky retorted, "I'll—I'll. . . ."

"Look here," Polovodov continued stubbornly, "if I put my trust in Uncle Oscar, you can do the same."

"You fool, you fool, you fool," Lyakhovsky thought to himself in a fury, paying no heed to Polovodov. "You've put yourself into the hands of the first likely German that came along. That's insane! I don't trust you, or anything you say. Not a single word. You'll sell me, you'll dupe me, you'll let me down."

"I know nothing, and I know how to keep my mouth shut," Uncle Oscar declared in his turn, breaking the oppressive silence.

"I want nothing whatsoever to do with you," Lyakhovsky replied brusquely, jumping to his feet. "I don't care a whit whether you talk or not. D'you understand? Not a whit."

"That's no way of doing business," Polovodov reasoned. "I warned you, and you agreed."

"You lie! I never agreed, and couldn't have agreed," Lyakhovsky snapped.

Polovodov whistled, while Lyakhovsky dropped back into the armchair, and measured Uncle Oscar with a hostile glance. Chewing his lips soundlessly and passing his hand through his tuft of hair, he turned to Uncle Oscar:

"Well, why are you silent? Of what service can you be to us? What's on your mind?"

"Oh, plenty. Plenty," Uncle Oscar remarked.

"Plenty, plenty," Lyakhovsky mocked him. "You should first learn to speak Russian. Nicolas Veryovkin will be on his way any day now to raise the trusteeship issue, and I'd like to know what you have on your mind."

"Well, I'm a small man,' Uncle Oscar retorted in a businesslike tone, "and so are you—both small men. But where small flies get caught in the cobweb, the big ones tear it."

Lyakhovsky chewed his lips again, rubbed his forehead, and uttered:

"But you know, of course, that big flies like to take the biggest slice of the cake, don't you?"

"We must chose the lesser of two evils. Either lose all or sacrifice a part," Uncle Oscar reasoned.

"Well, what's on your mind?" Lyakhovsky urged.

"The most important thing is to win time," Uncle Oscar explained imperturbably. "While Veryovkin and Privalov will try to have the trusteeship abolished, we'll do the simplest of all things—drag the affair out. You see, there's a lady in Petersburg—not a courtesan in the strict sense of the word—who has intimate connections in spheres, where...."

"Cut it short—big men visit her, eh?" Lyakhovsky interrupted, shrugging his bony shoulders impatiently.

"Exactly. If she takes up the case, she can do much. Very much, I say," Uncle Oscar explained.

"But she's to be paid—the lady," Lyakhovsky groaned, clutching his head. "D'you understand? P-a-i-d."

"She takes a certain commission. It may be five or ten per cent—depending on the circumstances; no fixed rate, you know. We'll have to pay her something in advance, of course, a trifle of, say, fifteen or twenty thousand."

"Oh-oh!" Lyakhovsky groaned again, as though he was having a tooth extracted. "No, thank you. I don't have such money. Enough."

"What's the matter with you?" Polovodov intervened. "Hear him out, then cut all the capers you like."

"I must admit, twenty thousand is a considerable sum," Uncle Oscar continued coolly, rubbing his hands. "But think how inoffensively it'll all be done. She doesn't hold

official receptions. For her to receive you, you must be recommended by a number of other ladies."

"Who must also be paid?" Lyakhovsky ejaculated, gnashing his teeth.

"Yes. Three or four thousand."

"But what for?"

"What d'you mean?" Uncle Oscar uttered in surprise. "They aren't ordinary prostitutes. They belong to noble families. A house in the best residential street, a carriage with a coat of arms, a tall liveried coachman, marble staircases, bronze and flowers. All that costs a lot of money, you know."

"Yes, a lot, a lot. Much too much," Lyakhovsky groaned.

He was so utterly thrown out of gear that they had to nurse him. Uncle Oscar was imperturbable, and even excelled Alfons Bogdanich in that respect. He did not raise his voice and did not bite his tongue as Alfons Bogdanich was wont to do in critical moments.

"Tell me, for God's sake, are you made of cardboard or something?" Lyakhovsky raged, prodding Uncle Oscar with his finger.

After a drawn-out struggle Lyakhovsky finally agreed with Uncle Oscar's theory of "dragging the case out," but persisted in his question:

"How do I know you won't cheat me? Tell me, how?"

"I'll give you receipts from the lady herself," Uncle Oscar suggested placidly.

"You'll write them yourself, eh?"

On leaving Lyakhovsky Uncle Oscar heaved a sigh of relief and had to wipe his forehead with a handkerchief; Polovodov also cut a miserable figure and looked round with clouded eyes.

"He's the devil incarnate," Uncle Oscar uttered at long last as they emerged into the street.



"He's worse than the devil," Polovodov agreed, shuffling his feet. "But you'll see, our day will come."

"At what cost!" Uncle Oscar sighed. He was pale and was wretchedly blinking his eyes.

Polovodov and Uncle Oscar had not, of course, revealed their main plan of action to Lyakhovsky, and meant to make use of him only in the first phase of their cunning scheme in order to drag out the trusteeship case.

## XX

Privalov no longer derived the same pleasure from his evening visits to the Bakharevs. There was Pavla Kolkopkova with her eternal knitting, Dosifeya, and Marya with her reminiscences of the "righteous" days. The monotony was only broken by Vera, who had grown used to Privalov and conversed with him, blushing deeply every time and not knowing what to do with her hands. Privalov liked chatting with the girl, who seemed to infuse her youth into Marya Bakhareva's sedate ménage.

"It's dull," Vera would say, looking timidly at Privalov.

"Why?" he would ask.

"Oh, no one ever visits us . . . almost."

"What about your friends?"

"We haven't any. Gold-miners come to Father, and then only on business. As for Mother, only old men and old women come to her chapel. There are two or three homes we visit with Mother sometimes, but it's even duller there than here. It seems the rich live a duller life than the poor. True. . . ."

"You're quite right." Privalov laughed. "But if you had your choice, what would you do?"

The question caught Vera unawares. She looked suspiciously at Privalov, but the good-humoured look on her face reassured her, and she uttered naively:

"I'd see to it that everyone had his share of joy. Yes, Mother thinks joy is sin, but that's untrue. If a person works all day, he should have fun in the evening—I mean theatres, concerts, troikas. I love fast driving that takes your breath away."

"Don't you ever go to the theatre?" Privalov asked.

"Oh, just once in a long, long while. Mother never goes, and we have to make Father take us. Mother sulks and sighs for days and days afterwards. We throw a ball in winter. But it's nothing like the one they have at Lya-khovsky's. I went to theirs for the first time last year. It was a dream! As for ours, we usually have a lot of merchants and—and they drink."

Little by little Privalov was admitted into Vera's little world, and often thought what a nice girl she was. Nadine scarcely ever showed up in the parlour, and when she did she looked tired and bored. They had no more of their conversations, and Privalov always went away with a troubled mind.

One day, when Privalov and Vera were having a quiet talk in the blue guest-room, Vasily Bakharev's heavy footfalls resounded in the corridor. The girl flushed. Privalov also felt awkward, but the day was saved by Marya Bakhareva who happened to enter the guest-room through the other door and met the old man as he came in. Vasily Bakharev was taken aback on seeing Privalov, and said with a smile:

"Well, why don't you ever come to see me?"

"You're always so busy."

"I'm busy alright, but you drop in anyhow." The old man stayed on in the guest-room and spoke with Privalov about the trusteeship and his visits to the trustees. Privalov saw by his expression that he was displeased but kept control of himself. Their conversation was reserved and somewhat tense, despite Vasily Bakharev's efforts to appear as cheerful and friendly as of old.

"Where's Nadine?" the old man asked his wife.

"She's unwell," Marya Bakhareva replied, pursing her lips. "It's your books that did it. She reads and reads till she's blue in the face."

Bakharev laughed and glanced tenderly at Vera.

"What about you, little goose? D'you read too?"

"Leave her alone for Christ's sake!" Marya stood up for her favourite, who blushed to her ears.

After this episode Privalov saw old Bakharev more often, and they talked endlessly about the trusteeship. But hard as they tried, they could not strike upon the old hearty, intimate tone. When Privalov gave an account of what he had learned from Lyakhovsky's papers, the old man shook his head suspiciously:

"No, it doesn't sound right. You should go to the mills yourself without delay, and send your solicitor to the Mokhov Court of Wards to look into the matter. That'll be surer."

It was no less dull at the Lyakhovskys'. Zosya sulked Loskutov was spending his second week in Uzel and often visited her. There was no more thought of the former pastimes. Polovodov scarcely ever showed up, and departed whenever Loskutov appeared on the scene. He could not stand the philosopher and always pulled a wry face on sighting him.

"Why don't you like Maxim?" Zosya asked, but Polovodov only shrugged his shoulders and grunted unintelligibly.

Soon Privalov noticed that Zosya treated Nadine with badly concealed ill-will. She bullied her in Loskutov's presence, and her dark eyes were true daggers. The doctor averted an open war between his wards with the tact of a man of the world, and looked strangely pensive whenever Loskutov began to speak. "There's something behind all this," thought Privalov.

One hot mid-July day Privalov wandered aimlessly in

the garden, coming at last to an old, tumble-down summer-house away in the thickets. He sat there oblivious of the time, day-dreaming. The sound of soft voices suddenly intruded upon his thoughts. Someone was walking down the alley in his direction, and before he realized the disadvantage of his position Nadine's shapely figure appeared from behind the deep-green firs arm-in-arm with Loskutov. Privalov meant to make his presence known, but hesitated just a second too long for some reason, and felt his heart jump violently at what he heard.

"Let's sit here, Maxim," Nadine said, adding: "I shouldn't like to meet Privalov."

"Why?" Loskutov asked, dropping on to the grass. "I like him. He's a fine chap."

Privalov could no longer leave his ambush now without causing embarrassment. The friendliness of Nadine's "Let's sit here" had burst upon him with its implications of intimacy.

"He is that," the girl agreed, "but he's done us harm. His arrival in Uzel has ruined our plans. It took me the whole winter to prepare Father—well, about us."

Nadine chuckled, and Privalov heard the sound of kisses. The blood rushed to his head, and everything round him began to whirl.

"I can't see the harm Privalov's done us," Loskutov said.

"Don't you? Father and Mother want us—Privalov and me—to be married."

"I thought Father and Privalov had a falling-out."

"Yes. But you don't know my father. He may be mad at Privalov just now, but Privalov is still Privalov."

"What d'you mean?"

"What do I mean?" Nadine repeated Loskutov's

question. "Just this: whatever Privalov does, Father will forgive. What is more, he'd give him his last to put him back on his feet. It's a blind sort of adoration of the name, a kind of name worship. Logic has nothing to do with it. The old man will do just this, and nothing else, because that's the thing to do. Children are like that too."

"But he's not a child, Nadine."

"The only difference," Nadine declared, "is that he has all the means to do what he thinks right, while children don't. It may look strange from the side, but if you'd take Father's point of view there's really nothing funny in it."



# **PART**

# THREE





## I

**A**N OMINOUS silence pressed hard upon all the inmates of the Bakharev household.

Old Luka in his cubby-hole was morose and ill-humoured. He growled all day long and kept at his polishing to drive away the gloom, hovering over the door-knobs, hinges and the bronze letter-box. He polished the latter with particular zeal, as though seeking to get on its good side. It had a special, mysterious purpose in Luka's eyes. Horrid hours of silence engulfed the Bakharev house all through this small box, and every morning Luka approached it with superstitious fear.

One day, after Luka brought Vasily Bakharev the latest mail, duly taken from the letter-box, the old man took longer than usual to read it, then rubbed his sore knee, and said:

"Well, old man, we're in the soup."

Luka's heart missed a beat. His jaw dropped.

"Things are going from bad to worse at the Varvarinsk Mine," his master explained. "There'll be nothing for us to do the coming summer."

It was ever since that ill-omened morning that the quiet descended upon the recently cheerful Bakharev house.

It was August, but the autumn was coming into its own. Two of the mornings were so cold that patches of yellow spotted the garden, and the flower-bed in the yard turned entirely black. The days grew shorter and at night a strong wind piped in the foliage. Superstitious Luka mumbled prayers and crossed himself fervently when the tin roofing rattled in the wind, or the wind whistled in the chimney. The old man's study was next to his cubby-hole and the loyal servitor had his ear cocked long past midnight for sounds issuing from that chamber. His master also burnt the midnight oil, sitting

up nights over some writing or over his abacus. "It's those infernal letters," Luka thought, listening intently.

In the day-time Luka appeared more cheerful and kept looking across the courtyard towards Dosifeya's domain in the servants' quarters. Marya Bakhareva had no secrets from her deaf-and-dumb sister, and the latter would sometimes share them with Luka, though she did it with misgivings because Luka was liable to let the cat out of the bag, particularly after he had had more to drink than was good for him. He would saunter into the kitchen, pull a chair up to the table, and wait patiently until Dosifeya, busy with her pots and pans, outlined the state of affairs with a few eloquent gestures. Luka learned in this manner that something had come between Privalov and Nadine, and that Nadine would not tell her mother about it. As for Privalov, he did not leave his house and was probably ill.

"It's been weeks and weeks." Luka sighed.

The servitor made his own inquiries with Ipat, who reassured him that Privalov was not ill at all and had merely locked himself in his room, refusing to see anyone. He had not shown himself at the Bakharevs' for three full weeks, and Vasily Bakharev had asked about him several times.

"He doesn't know," Dosifeya explained, "nor does anyone."

## II

One day, when Luka felt particularly low, nagging Igorka each time he caught sight of him, he was whipped into a fury by a loud peal of the bell.

"What's the devil sent us this time?" he growled, dawdling intentionally before the door. "Where's the fire? Probably a lawyer, God forbid!"

The bell rang louder a second time. Luka slowly pulled the door open and stepped back aghast. A short,

round, grey-haired individual with a sallow Asiatic face, a flat nose and narrow coal-black eyes stood in the doorway. He had come a long way, as his mud-spattered Tatar cloak and crumpled felt hat testified.

"Lord Jesus Christ!" Luka shrank back, his voice horror-filled. "It isn't you, Danila?"

"Take hold of your eyes and see if it isn't," the man replied hoarsely, pushing his fat body past Luka into the hallway. "Didn't know me, did you, old fogey? Getting soft in the head, eh? Well, what are you staring at? It's me—Danila."

He cackled, pulled off his white hat and ran his stubby plump fingers through his silver hair.

"What's brought you here, Danila?" Luka looked worried. "Lord Jesus Christ, what is it this time?"

"Cool down, old boy. I didn't fall out of the clouds," Danila reassured him. "It's twenty days tomorrow since I left the Sayans."

"The mines, you mean?" Luka queried.

"Of course. What else? But I can't stand here talking to you all day," Danila growled. "Is the old man at home?"

"Yes, yes."

"I'll go right in," Danila declared, but Luka protested vehemently.

"Not the way you look. You'll scare the life out of him. Wash up a bit. Look at all the mud you're carrying."

"Mud? I've been three weeks on the road—no time to change clothes. My hand's swollen from slapping the coachmen. Honest to God!"

"Blast you," Luka growled, dragging the visitor to his cubby-hole. "This is no time for joking. Better tell me what brought you."

"I've come. That's all you have to know," Danila replied. He flung his stiff cloak off his herculean shoulders, revealing a soiled striped silk Tatar beshmet.

"You've brought bad news. I feel it in my bones," Luka fretted, producing a towel. "The old man wasn't expecting you. Not a bit. Yet you're here—like a bolt out of the blue."

"I like doing things in a hurry."

"Should have written a letter first—or something. You've written so many. I took them all to the old man myself."

"Now there's nothing to write about. Letters travel slowly. I came post-haste. Got a drop of something, maybe? My throat's dry."

"You've been drinking all the way—I can see," Luka retorted. "There, look at your bloated face."

"True enough, old Luka, true enough," Danila confessed.

"I know. As soon as you came to town you had a shot, eh? Khe-khe-khe," Luka cackled.

Danila waved his hand hopelessly, and began with his ablutions. Luka watched the process in silence, then some thought occurred to him and he hurried out of the cubby-hole.

"Where's the fire?" Danila inquired, soaping his muscular, bronze arms.

"Won't be a minute. Hang on," Luka muttered.

"See you don't tell the missus," Danila warned.

But Luka did not catch his words and hobbled at the double to Marya Bakhareva's chambers. At Nadine's door he pressed his lips to the key-hole and whispered:

"Miss, I say, miss. A moment."

"What is it, Luka?" Nadine asked, coming to the door.

"Oh dear, miss, he's come—the blackamoor. Honest to God. He's in my cubby-hole."

"Who's come?" Nadine inquired in bewilderment.

"Oh, Lord Jesus Christ! Danila's come! I can see by his face he's brought bad news. And a frightening sight he is, too. He might scare the life out of our master. So I've come, because..."

Ignoring Luka's stammered message Nadine hurried to the hallway, where she came face to face with Danila himself. Danila had evidently had a shot or two since arriving in town and was smiling broadly, his Kalmyk eyes no more than tiny slits.

"Why, you old fogey," he attacked Luka. "You've spread the news, I see. How d'you do, miss? You're getting to be a pretty girl."

He kissed Nadine's hand and declared innocently:

"Well, here I am."

"Yes. But what brought you, Danila?"

"Oh, nothing. Nothing doing at the mines. Thought I'd come here."

"What d'you mean?"

"Nothing," he said, waving his arm and laughing. Then he added, suddenly growing serious: "Bad goings-on, miss. Came to fetch your father."

"Wait here a minute, please." Nadine left the visitor in the hallway. "I'll see Father. He isn't quite well, you know."

Vasily Bakharev was seated in his armchair, reading a newspaper. He smiled at his daughter and stretched out his hand to her.

"I thought the doctor was here," Nadine lied, wondering how she should break the news.

"The doctor doesn't come until dusk. It's only noon now."

"How's your leg, Father?"

"The doctor promised to mend it by spring, dear. But it'll be the death of me, sitting here without a thing to do," the old man complained.

"Have you been expecting Danila?" Nadine asked cautiously.

"No. Why?"

"Oh, I just asked," Nadine replied. "Seems I saw him from my window."

"Impossible!"

"I must have been seeing things."

The old man looked anxiously at his daughter, and rubbed his ailing knee. Danila's hoarse guffaw reached his ears that instant and, turning pale, he murmured:

"He's here, Nadine. It was him—laughing, wasn't it?"

"Yes, it was, Father." Nadine replied. "May I stay in the room when he comes?"

"No, my dove. Later—in the evening. Send him to me."

Nadine kissed her father on the forehead and left.

Danila stumbled into Bakharev's sanctuary on his bowlegs.

"Something terrible's in the air," Luka whispered, following in Nadine's footsteps. "I can feel it."

"Stay here and keep your ears cocked," the girl told him. "I'm afraid Father may have a stroke. Understand? Call me at once if anything happens."

"Certainly. I'll call you as soon as anything happens," Luka promised. "Danila has something up his sleeve. I can see it in his eyes. Honest to God. Oh-oh."

### III

No sooner did Nadine return to her room than Vera hurried in pale and frightened. She stammered:

"Father's yelling his head off. Go. Quick. Something terrible has happened—Luka's crying. Heavens, what's this all about?" Vera buried her face in her hands.

Reaching the dining-room Nadine heard desperate

shouts. Her father's voice was unrecognizable. On pulling open the door of his study she saw Danila in the corner, red in the face, beads of sweat on his forehead, and her father stalking from corner to corner in indescribable fury, like a wounded animal. He presented a terrifying sight—foaming at the mouth, fists clenched, advancing on Danila. The outburst of anger deadened the pain in his leg. The old man, bleary-eyed, was tearing the remnants of the grey hair on his head.

"You've ruined me! R-u-i-n-e-d, d'you understand?" he shouted wildly. "My whole family—ruined! All—all of us."

"God's merciful," Danila ventured when Nadine appeared in the doorway. "We'll set things right."

"Set things right? No, I'll kill you—I'll break every bone in your body! The very first time that I didn't go to the mines things are turned topsy-turvy. And now Rabotkin absconds with what money was left. Good heavens! I'll see to all of you tomorrow. Twiddled your thumbs, eh? Drank and played the fool, eh? Isn't there somebody I can depend on?"

Nadine signalled Danila to leave the room. An oppressive silence ensued, which seemed like an age to both Father and daughter. The girl dropped on to the sofa, waiting for the old man to spend his fury. Nadine learned from his incoherent stream of invective that all the money he had sent to the mines had been stolen by Rabotkin, the cashier. She kept her silence, letting her father vent his rage; to approach him now, she knew, would be like adding oil to the fire. The scene lasted about half an hour, until Vasily Bakharev finally dropped sobbing into his armchair. The storm was subsiding and Nadine said:

"Why d'you upset yourself so, Father? No use crying over spilt milk. Compose yourself and think it over."

"There's just one thing to think about as far as we're concerned," he shouted, leaping up from his seat again. "We're paupers!"

But his outburst of anger was obviously on the wane. Tears mingled with curses and groans. Then the old man fell into that pained semi-consciousness in which men lose all control over what they say.

"Alone, alone," Bakharev groaned, leaning back in his chair. "No one to lean on for support. I wish I was dead. Poverty—disgrace! Oh, my God!"

#### IV

Danila Shelekhov was a baptized Kirghiz, purchased by Sergei Privalov's grandfather during one of the steppe famines. His hunger-crazed parents were glad to sell the bright little lad for a sack of flour and a pair of inferior boots. Like a trapped young beast, the boy of the steppes was brought to the Shatrov Mills, and then to Uzel. At first he was totally lost in the numerous crowd of retainers, and served on the mill-owner's person for several years. As a boy in his teens, Shelekhov fell into the hands of Gulyayev, who had just developed his mines in Siberia. This determined his place in life. Later he worked hand-in-hand with Bakharev, who managed the Gulyayev properties, and finally the two of them went to work for Alexander Privalov.

By nature Shelekhov always remained a man of the steppes. His ways were a bizarre mixture of virtues and failures. Left to shift for himself he would surely have lost his head in the whirl of civilization, but the gold-mines saved him from this fate. At the mines Shelekhov earned the reputation which put him on an intimate footing with gold prospectors. In the quest for gold, prospecting in the taiga and in impassable backwoods, Shelekhov was indispensable. His iron constitution, it seemed,



knew nothing of fatigue, and he had no equal in such feats as spending months in the heart of the taiga, living for weeks under the canvas shelter of a tent in the mountain snows, and in making thousand-verst marches on horseback. Many years of practice evolved a certain "instinct"; he seemed to be able to tell by a fifth sense where the earth held gold, and old Bakharev often consulted him when in difficulty.

But indispensable as Shelekhov was in prospecting expeditions, he was unbearable, even pitiful, at all other times, when it came to systematic, persistent work. He worked in fits and starts, displaying short-lived but astounding vigour, and was absolutely unfit for any consistent effort.

He had a remarkable gift for spending everything he had saved at the mines in several years once he came to town. In such cases he became unmanageable, and Bakharev would patiently wait for the day when the self-indulgent Danila had spent his last kopek.

"Well, had your fill?" Vasily Bakharev would ask then.

"To the hilt," the latter would reply, looking sallow and bloated.

"It's a load off your shoulders, isn't it? Now you go back to the grindstone, eh?"

"Just as you say," the Kirghiz answered. "They've stripped me naked."

Marya Bakhareva had a profound faith in Danila's genius. She was convinced that Shelekhov had a God-given "nose" for gold, and that everything would be thrown out of gear if he ever absented himself from the mines. That was why after he was hauled over the coals in the old man's study, she took him to her own half, gave him tea and pampered him, condescending to the extent of presenting him with a silver cup of anise wine. The silver cup was a special portent to the super-

stitious old woman, because Pavel Gulyayev himself had drunk from it in his day. Whenever Shelekhov dissipated his all, and his silk beshmet into the bargain, he had only to slink into Dosifeya's kitchen and all his squandered clothing would reappear as if by magic, while he himself was gently upbraided for appearance's sake and then feasted and regaled according to the rules and customs of sectarian hospitality.

So it was that after the storm in Vasily Bakharev's study Shelekhov slunk to the "old lady's" half, where the cup of anise wine and a boiling samovar awaited him.

"What was the row about?" Marya Stepanovna asked in a friendly tone, pointing in the direction of her husband's chambers.

"Had a little chat," Shelekhov grinned, wiping his sweating face with a handkerchief.

"Fine chat, I must say!"

"Well, there it was, and if you look into the facts of the matter there was every reason to knock us about a bit, I'd say," the Kirghiz confessed.

"Done a lot of damage, I suppose?"

"Couldn't be worse, missus."

"The workers all gone?" she asked.

"To the last man."

"What else?"

"Remember Rabotkin—the cashier? The scoundrel took all the money and bolted. I've hunted high and low for him—he's vanished into thin air."

"That's what vodka does to a man, Danila."

"Vodka it was, damn it," Danila agreed humbly. "How to get out of the predicament—that's the question."

"You got us into it, now you get us out of it," Marya observed didactically.

Shelekhov looked round cautiously, and then whispered hoarsely into Marya's ear:

"I've got my eye on a spot—a gold-mine! Only I didn't tell the old man about it yet. Let him cool down. A Bur-yat I know came upon the place by accident."

This news reassured Marya, and she said in a kindly way:

"Swill less vodka. Give it a rest. Look at your swollen face—it's like an inflated balloon."

"That's from travelling," Danila protested. "I rode like mad for twenty days—hard, like a regular governor-general."

At tea Marya Bakhareva confided all her troubles to him. He lent a sympathetic ear, sighed heavily and shook his unruly head.

"D'you hear about Sergei Privalov?" she asked when Danila was draining his third glass of tea.

"No, why?"

"He's here, in Uzel."

Danila leaped to his feet. "D'you mean it?"

"Yes. He's come to stay."

"He must call on you often?"

"He did at first, but now it's been weeks. I can't imagine what on earth has happened to him."

"I suppose he's fallen ill—or something," Danila stated questioningly.

"Maybe so, and maybe not," Marya Bakhareva replied mysteriously and, looking round furtively, in her turn told Danila the whole story of Privalov's stay in Uzel, making no secret of the little row her husband had had with him, and concluded by complaining about her eldest daughter, who was every inch like her father and had probably played some trick on Sergei.

Marya had no secrets from Danila. He was one of the family, a man who kept his mouth shut, and would not give one away even on the rack.

"There's a reason—there must be," Danila remarked profoundly, scratching his head. "I saw the miss today.

She's a regular princess, a credit to you in anyone's eyes—as pretty as a poppy.”

“She's pretty as a poppy alright, but I'm afraid she may wilt soon,” the old woman muttered with a suppressed sigh. “You know how quickly a girl's beauty fades, and Nadine isn't as young as she was; she's over twenty. She and her father have put their heads together, but God isn't granting her happiness. It's a short step to spinsterhood. And that Privalov's a simpleton, let me tell you. Can't think who he takes after. I suppose it's his mother, Varvara.”

“I'll go and see him,” Danila uttered pensively.

“Do that, Danila dear. It's rather awkward for me to send emissaries. But you're different. It would be quite natural for you to call.”

## V

Privalov sprawled for hours on his sofa, or paced his room like a caged beast. But the nights were worst of all when silence descended and blank despair weighed heavily on his heart. He relived the summer a thousand times in his thoughts. It appeared like a shimmering happy dream which had dispersed like a mist.

Khiona watched him alertly. She sensed that something unusual had happened, but could not get to the bottom of it, hard as she tried. In making her thousand guesses, she proceeded from the premise that the Bakharevs had been after the wealthy suitor and that the wealthy suitor himself had had his eye on their daughter. Could Nadine have refused him—the millionaire? No, that was out of the question. Could Privalov have fallen in love with Zosya? Or could the arrogant Nadine have had some mysterious love affair which Privalov had accidentally discovered? Khiona cudgelled her brains vain-

ly over the dilemma presented by the hated Bakharevs, Polovodovs and Lyakhovskys.

"Should I feign an interest in his health and visit him?" Khiona speculated, but each time put the silly thought out of her mind.

She had heard with her own ears that Privalov had ordered Ipat to receive no one—not even Nicolas Veryovkin. The fool Ipat, in seventh heaven over his new role of Cerberus, turned back everyone with uncommon dispatch. Polovodov had come, and Victor Bakharev, and the doctor, and they were all told the master was not receiving. Victor Bakharev had tried pushing his way past Ipat, who guarded the door like a hulking bear, but found it locked.

"Tell your master," Victor Bakharev fumed, "tell him, you dolt, that I'm dead—dead, d'you hear? Tell him that."

Nicolas Veryovkin called several times, but in vain. This imperturbable individual had only one thing to say, which he addressed to Khiona, "Fine lodger you have, eh? Perhaps you've locked him up in your boarding-school?"

Khiona suffered the tortures of hell, but it is in just such unhappy circumstances that happy ideas are born, and one of them finally occurred to her. She decided to have her husband, Victor Zaplatin, see Privalov.

"I think you should visit Privalov today," she said indifferently, as though speaking of a thing long since decided. "He's been with us almost six months, and you've never once called on him. Does it always have to be I who must go to the rooms of an unmarried young man?!"

"What would I want with him?" Victor Zaplatin uttered despairingly.

"What d'you mean? Isn't that nice! Take the papers to him and say you're sorry you didn't do it before. Understand?"

Victor Zaplatin set out. A minute later Khiona heard his timid knock, and Privalov's "come in."

"Pardon," Zaplatin murmured, hiding the newspapers behind his back, "I—I hope I'm not intruding. Here are the papers."

"If I'm not mistaken..." Privalov began.

"Precisely, precisely—Victor Zaplatin. Yes."

"Pleased to meet you. Have a seat."

Their eyes met. Privalov looked pale and kind, and Zaplatin's tongue ran away with him:

"Don't hold it against me, Sergei Alexandrovich. I would never have disturbed you. It's my wife—honest to God!"

Privalov looked stupidly at his embarrassed guest, then smiled; he took an instant liking to this henpecked husband. He had been somewhat annoyed by the unexpected visit at first, but a few minutes later was even glad of the company of a living being. Meanwhile, Victor Zaplatin thought himself lost; his infernal tongue had let him down again, but Privalov's smile gave him new courage. Some fifteen minutes later they were chatting amicably, like old acquaintances, which fact immeasurably surprised Matryona who thought her master incapable of speech.

In parting Victor Zaplatin suddenly turned and asked: "Have you heard the latest, Sergei Alexandrovich?"

"No, I'm afraid I haven't."

"The whole town's talking about it."

"Oh?"

"Vasily Bakharev—he's bankrupt."

The news was so utterly sudden that Privalov looked incredulously at Victor Zaplatin, wondering if the latter was raving mad.

"It's a fact," Zaplatin continued. "They're all talking about it. My Khiona, you know, has a good nose for that

sort of thing. She's been running about town since early morning."

"How did it happen? It's so sudden."

"Bankruptcies are always sudden. They say the cashier absconded with the money," Zaplatin explained.

## VI

The news of Bakharev's bankruptcy spread like wild-fire. It was difficult to say who spread it, and by what devious means it was circulated. Bad news, like water, seeps through the narrowest cracks. Zaplatina was naturally one of the first to learn of it and hurried to the scene to make sure. She wanted most to see how Marya and that stuck-up Nadine comported themselves. "Serves them right!" the worthy lady held forth in Agrippina Veryovkina's parlour. "They put on airs; I'd like to see them now." Khiona had not forgotten, of course, how Marya had treated her the last time, but her curiosity got the better of all her other sentiments, and as usual, she could not control it. Furthermore, she would not be going to the old Marya after all.

Khiona tramped with her usual familiarity into Marya's chambers, kissed the frowning Vera, and rattled off hurriedly:

"Ah, *mon ange*, *mon ange*, I've missed you so, *mon ange*! You can't imagine! I meant to come before, but something always cropped up. My head's simply reeling. And where's Mother? Praying? Why have you changed so, Vera? You aren't ill, are you, *mon ange*?"

"Mother's in the chapel. I'll call her," Vera replied.

She left the room unhurriedly; Khiona's joy and chatter left an unpleasant impression, and stabbed painfully at her young heart. Why was Khiona so cheerful? Could she know? Vera bit her lip to hold back tears of anger.

Waiting for Marya in the parlour Khiona was genuinely excited. She wondered how Marya Bakhareva would receive her; yet, on the other hand, her attitude towards the environment which but recently she had so revered, had changed entirely. She looked round calmly, as though she was here for the first time, and made a mental price estimate of the things she saw. The furniture, she thought, was worthless, and as for the carpets, paintings and mirrors, they would fetch a certain amount, while the Japanese porcelain and the Chinese service in the glass cupboard were entirely a different story. Her mouth watered at the thought that she would have the opportunity of buying all these trifles for next to nothing.

"Ah, Marya!" Khiona started out of her daydreams as the tall frame of her hostess appeared in the doorway.

At the sight of the smiling Khiona something snapped in Marya's breast. She guessed by her visitor's furtive glances that the bankruptcy was known to the whole town and that Khiona had come like an early crow to feast on the remains. The blood rushed to her head, and she was on the point of breaking into tears, but summoned her self-control and wore her usual proud smile as she shook hands with her visitor.

"Please—please pardon me, Marya," Khiona cackled, kissing her hostess. "I was so very, very busy all the time. You know how it is—you have your own children and know how much they cost their parents. Yes. Furthermore, there's Sergei Alexandrovich—but you've probably heard about him?"

Marya was totally indifferent to Khiona's chatter, and only shook her head negatively in reply. Not to give herself away, she ordered the samovar and sent Vera to bring the preserves.

"I don't know what to do," Khiona continued. "He's locked himself in his room and refuses to see anyone."

"Who locked himself in?" asked Marya.



"Sergei Alexandrovich. Oh, dear! Don't tell me you really hadn't heard!" Khiona exclaimed.

"Who'd tell me," Marya retorted. "If he's locked himself in, he must have some business. My husband doesn't leave his study for weeks on end. Nothing unusual in that."

But Khiona, unabashed, asked in an entirely different tone:

"How's Nadine?"

"Not quite well, I think..." was the reply.

"Really? What a pity! Young people aren't at all like the young people of our day," Khiona observed. "When I was sixteen—but isn't it a strange coincidence? Privalov won't leave his room either—too busy, or ill. And Nadine too."

Marya Bakhareva swallowed the pill in silence. For an hour she was on pins and needles, but managed to preserve a bold front, succeeding even in getting home a few telling blows at Khiona, who had been counting on an easy triumph.

"How's your husband?" Khiona asked innocently, like an experienced strategist who keeps the trump in reserve. "There are rumours about his health."

"He's better. He'll probably go to the mines soon."

Marya's imperturbable demeanour somewhat shook Khiona. At one point she even doubted Bakharev's bankruptcy, but there was too much proof at her disposal; Shelekhov's arrival, for example, was incontrovertible evidence.

"Oh, I've lost all sense of time chatting with you," she recalled, gulping down her tea. "I must be at ten other places today. Good-bye, dear Marya!"

She stuck her nose into two or three other rooms under the pretext of having lost her way before Vera saw her out of the house; the wish to see all the things soon to be auctioned was overpowering.

"What a beautiful vase! What a splendid carpet!" she whispered, touching them with trembling fingers. She had a foretaste of her spoils and already made up her mind what things she would buy herself and what she would leave for Agrippina. The things she chose for herself were the best, of course, and what she generously left for her bosom friend was less desirable.

## VII

In the morning, as Luka and Danila were having their tea, the bell rang timorously in the hallway.

"Who could that be?" Luka wondered, heading for the door.

It was Privalov. Luka did not recognize him at first. He was pale and his eyes were lifeless.

"May I see the mistress?" he asked.

"Yes, of course, Sergei Alexandrovich!" the old servant replied. "But what's come over you? You've changed. Has anything happened?"

"Yes, a bit," Privalov smiled. "I was unwell."

"Isn't that terrible?"

When Privalov turned to relieve himself of his coat, he came face to face with Danila. The latter gave him a penetrating look. There was something familiar in his sallow face with its high cheek-bones, the sparse silver beard and narrow coal-black eyes.

"You don't recognize me, I suppose?" Danila said with a smile.

"Is it you, Danila?"

"In person."

They greeted each other.

"I've called on you," Danila uttered hoarsely, "but your man wouldn't let me in. I'd have twisted his neck, but he said the master was ill."

"Yes, that's quite true. I was."

The unexpected encounter made no impression on Privalov. He did not even ask Danila why he had left the mines. When, a few minutes ago, he had raised his hand to the bell, his heart had leaped like a frightened bird. He saw Danila through a fog and was now striding along the soft carpet across the dining-room with a heavy heart, dreading to hear the familiar rustle of Nadiné's dress, the sound of her dear voice, and anticipating the fixed, placid glance of the one who, for him, was lost for ever. The Bakharev house seemed to him a tomb that held what he prized most, and with it his heart.

In the dining-room he practically walked into Vera. The girl did not take fright. Nor did she blush, as was her custom. She gave Privalov a look that stabbed him in the heart. It was the look of an enemy who would not forgive, and Privalov thought sadly: "Why does she hate me so?"

"Mother's in the parlour," Vera uttered coldly.

"May I see her?"

"Yes."

Marya Bakhareva, in round, old-fashioned spectacles, was sitting in an armchair and reading the *Book of Kiril*. In her darkest hours she always resorted to her favourite sectarian volumes, in which she found solace and support. The sound of Privalov's footsteps made her turn her head, and when she saw him in the doorway she rose to meet him, stately and calm as usual. They exchanged glances in silence.

"Bless you," Marya said. "Why'd you stop in the doorway? Sit down—be a guest."

Sizing Privalov up through half-closed eyelids, she added:

"You seem to have changed."

"I was ill."

"Yes, so I've heard," Marya replied. "Your Khiona dropped in the other day and reported it. Danila meant to visit you, and came back empty-handed. You have a grouchy butler, he says. Firm as a rock."

"I just saw Danila," Privalov revealed. "He's the same as ever. He hasn't changed at all, just grown a bit plumper, it seems. How's your husband?"

"He's better. Intends going to the mines with Konstantin this winter."

Privalov had expected to see Marya Bakhareva stricken with grief and despair. But here she was, her former calm and proud self. Only the book with the time-worn leather binding and the copper clasps was new to him, and he stared absent-mindedly at the stamped ornaments on its cover as Marya spoke of various trifles—just as if nothing had happened and they had only parted the day before. But her tactics did not deceive him. He sensed that Marya did not wish him, of all people, to see signs of weakness in her, because she was displeased with him and suspected him of something. What Vera had showed on the surface, was below the surface in Marya Bakhareva, mantled in a display of feigned indifference; Vera's open dislike was easier to bear than this typically sectarian behaviour of the proud old woman.

Marya was waiting for Privalov to pour his heart out to her, as at confession. At that she would have forgiven him. But he was obviously concealing something from her. His conscience was not clear.

Privalov grasped little of what Marya told him, and looked round with a sense of suppressed grief. Only yesterday this room had seemed dearest to his heart, and he had loved everything in it, from the wall-paper to the pots of geraniums and the white curtains on the windows. He was steeped in misery. Why this untruth and pretence? After all, he *could not* tell Marya what was in

his heart if she refused to speak to him about the matter which had brought him here. She could see, couldn't she, how much it hurt him to come, and yet she failed to understand what had made him come.

"Misunderstood again," Privalov thought bitterly, replying haphazardly to his hostess.

The chat was interrupted by Nadine.

"Mother, Pavla Kolpakova is asking for you," the girl said after greeting Privalov.

Her mother watched the scene alertly; Privalov paled and was evidently perturbed, while Nadine behaved as usual. This bewildered Marya. It seemed on the surface that nothing had come between the two, and yet something had. He was thrown off balance, wasn't he? She, Nadine, wasn't. "Can't deceive me, Nadine," the old woman thought, rising unwillingly from her seat. "I can see right through you—and your father; you're trying to be clever."

When Marya left the room, Privalov said with a boldness that frightened him:

"I must talk to you, Nadine."

"I suppose it's the rumours about us that brought you here?" she uttered.

"Yes."

"Did Mother say anything to you?"

"No."

"I knew it. She'll always be the same, to the bitter end, and will never give herself away. Yet she must have known why you came. Particularly since you're ill, and have been staying indoors."

"I'm not really ill," Privalov stammered, feeling the girl's penetrating glance. "But that doesn't matter. I should only like to know the actual state of affairs. I don't dare approach your father personally."

"That's wise of you," the girl agreed. "He wouldn't tell you much more than Mother. The rumours of our

bankruptcy are true. I can't tell you all the details. I'm afraid even Father himself isn't fully informed. One thing is clear, however—we're ruined."

The girl's composure surprised Privalov. He no longer thought of himself, of his position. His ego faded into the background; he only saw the girl—cool and placid, with a clear eye and pensively pursed lips, she had never been more beautiful. Her plain woollen dress, her simple hairdress, those sure, frank gestures—all were superbly fine, like a harmonious musical chord. Privalov had never been so madly in love as he was at that moment. Her large grey eyes penetrated into his very soul, where the love that he so wanted to suppress had risen with unequalled, frightening force.

"What would you say, Nadine," he asked, "if I were to offer your father everything I have?"

"You know Father would never accept it."

"But couldn't he be swayed through the intercession of some third person—I mean, couldn't he be persuaded to take what he has every right to take?"

Nadine shook her head.

"It'll be alright soon," the girl said after a brief pause. "All we can do is wait. Father's acting strange. He's lost heart. I've never seen him like this before. Perhaps it's due to his illness, or perhaps his age. He's had many ups and downs before."

"I'm convinced things would take an entirely different turn if he went to the mines himself," Privalov said. "Everybody knows him, he has an excellent reputation and a sound credit."

Nadine spoke of Shelekhov, whom she did not quite like. She thought him the chief cause of their misfortune. It was Danila who was to blame for the present bankruptcy, to be sure, but Father would not hear of parting with him.

As for Mother, she virtually worshipped Danila, and seemed to be of the belief that all Father's fortune was due solely to Danila's lucky star.

The conversation was interrupted by Marya Bakhareva, who had been watching the two for some time through a chink in the door. She did not know what to make of their friendly conversation. "Can't make them out," she thought, and vain ambitions again stirred in her breast. "Anything can happen," the old woman thought.

After a chat with Marya, Privalov made his farewells.

"You'll be gone another three weeks, I suppose," Marya said in a kinder voice. "Does Khiona lock you in?"

"Not that I know of."

"Don't go to the old man just now. He has someone with him," Marya warned. "He was asking about you."

"I'll call on him in a few days," Privalov promised.

"Fine. He'll be happy to see you."

## VIII

Two days later Privalov again called at the Bakharevs' and spent some time in the old man's study. The visit came to nothing. Bakharev spoke all the time about the trusteeship and did not utter a word about his own predicament. Privalov left without even looking in at Marya's, which somewhat offended the proud old woman.

Old Bakharev had grown accustomed to his new situation and appeared perfectly calm when discussing his affairs.

"We must raise some money before spring at all costs," he said to Nadine that evening.

The girl made no reply to this indirect question, and asked:

"It seems Privalov visited you today."

"Yes, he was here."

Bakharev looked questioningly at his daughter and smiled.

"D'you think I'd ask him for money?" he asked quietly.

"No, why ask? He might have offered it to you himself."

The old man thought for a minute, and then declared with a suppressed sigh, "No, dear, we old men can't cook stew with the young. We may eat the same bread, but we look different ways. I wouldn't accept Privalov's money even if he were to offer it to me."

A tense silence followed, equally oppressive to both Father and daughter.

"I want to tell you, Nadine," Bakharev said, "that I wouldn't be sitting here thinking how to raise the money if my time hadn't been up. All my old friends are either ruined or dead, and it's hard making new ones. There was a time when I'd only have to wink, and there'd be all the capital I'd want at my disposal, but now—I don't even know what they'll say at the bank; maybe they'll trust me. And if they don't, I'll have to turn to Lyakhovsky."

"I wouldn't, Father, if I were you."

"I know—I know, Nadine. But there's no choice. I still have some old accounts to settle with Lyakhovsky. When he first came to the Urals without a kopek to his name, it was I who gave him his chance. I don't want to take all the credit for it, but I did help him in his blackest hour."

"But he may refuse you."

"He can't," the old man replied. "He owes me too much."

Another pause.

In Marya's chambers the change of fortune was scarcely discernible at first glance. An inexperienced eye would fail to notice anything out of the ordinary. Things



went on as of old, in that strict order typical of wealthy sectarian homes. Marya was her own stately placid self, and had not changed any of her habits. She looked the same majestic *boyarina* in her sarafan and wimple, and, as before, held endless services in the chapel. Attending prayers were the same old men in their long caf-tans and the same suspicious-looking old women, who all their lives live off the hospitality and charity of the rich sectarian families. To a stranger they may appear like the scum that feeds on the crumbs from the rich man's table, but sectarian custom places them on an entirely different footing. They were very much at home in the Bakharev household and Marya herself bowed to the ground to them before each prayer, uttering humbly, "Brethren, forgive me, the sinner."

Nadine detested this make-believe humility, which cloaked the same failings and vices as those of the Nikonites. It was only on the surface that the time-honoured sectarian rites breathed a patriarchal simplicity. Her mother's behaviour was particularly unpleasant to the girl in the present circumstances. Why all these pretences at every step, in every gesture, in every glance? Nadine, straightforward and honest as she was, was revolted by this wretched comedy. Her sensitive young soul suffered terribly.

First love, with its delirious trepidations and sweet transports, opened her eyes to many previously unsuspected things. The dear shape of her beloved lurked at the back of each fact, each trifling manifestation of everyday life, demanding strict judgement. Each false note raised him in her eyes ever higher and higher, for to her he served as the embodiment of truth. His face stood before her eyes at all times, and in each little affair she consulted him mentally. Her own place in the household appeared particularly clear to her; she realized that in spite of her father's great affection she was a stranger

under the hospitable parental roof, perhaps even more a stranger than all the old men and women in the chapel.

"No wonder Konstantin went away," the girl often thought in her solitude, and even envied her brother, who could, being a man, do whatever he thought fit, and had once and for all shaken off the time-worn customs of the sectarian home.

It was just then, at the time of the ordeal which had befallen their home, that the girl at last perceived with a kind of morbid clarity all the secret springs that had been the moving force in their home. Before, she was somehow indifferent to the existence of two halves in their household. Now she understood what they meant: her mother, Marya Bakhareva, had no thought of submitting and visiting the study of her ailing husband. On the contrary, it seemed she had never before maintained with such punctuality the sacred separatism of her own half. The meaning of her behaviour was now plain as day: Marya had washed her hands of all the trials which, in her opinion, had come down on her husband for all his innovations, for his disloyalty to the old-faith, sectarian ideals of Gulyayev. Nothing had passed to that effect between Mother and daughter, but the latter now sensed that her sick father had been placed under her exclusive care. It was a kind of tacit agreement, and Nadine accepted it. With each passing day the rift between the two halves increased and took ever sharper form.

In the persons of her mother, Dosifeya and Vera, a tacit alliance had taken shape, which the present circumstances seemed to strengthen. In the restrained expressions of their faces and their firm glances, Nadine read as in a book the bitter struggle unfolding before her. The distance between the two camps seemed to shrink gradually, and Nadine dreaded the hour when all this chaos would tumble upon her father's head, who foresaw it and groped with failing hands for her futile intervention.

What assistance could she offer him, outside the care, wretched in its helplessness, that every daughter owed to her father? Her helplessness had now become a sore spot with her, and she envied the most wretched of muzhiks, who could at least dig the earth and chop wood. She was conscious of her position of a wealthy young lady, and was ready to cry at the thought that she was nothing more than a pretty, expensive toy in her father's home.

On the other hand, however, Nadine did love her mother and sister. Perhaps if they had not been rich there would not have been any division, and peace and quiet would have reigned in their home, as under the most modest roofs, blinking out of the tiniest windows. The society of Pavla Kolpakova, who often came to the Bakharevs and spent hours talking to Nadine, was a pleasant exception and a moral support.

"Keep your chin up, dear," the old woman consoled her, fumbling about with her endless handwork, "things will go right again. What can you do? Your mother is stiff-backed, but that isn't as bad as it could be. She has a kind heart."

## IX

Khiona came to feel the stimulating effect of the Privalov fortune. Antonida Polovodova entered Agrippina's parlour as she was, for the hundredth time, recounting all she had had time to learn and invent about the Bakharevs, Danila Shelekhov and Privalov. It should be noted that the relations between the two ladies, that is, between Khiona and Antonida, were amicable even before, though there were no signs of any special affection. Yet this time Antonida treated Khiona with marked respect. Khiona, of course, regarded herself sufficiently expert in things of this kind, and did not melt under her kind smiles. She even thought to herself cattishly: "I can tell,

my dear, that your arrogant hubby sent you!" They spoke about Bakharev's ruin, about Privalov, and Khiona utilized the convenient opportunity to feign total indifference to her lodger, which she did with astounding skill.

"I heard Privalov hardly ever visits the Bakharevs now," Antonida declared, also trying to feign indifference. "His trusteeship affairs are probably taking up all his time. My husband, for example, sits up nights over his papers."

"Oh, really, I pay no attention to whatever Privalov does," Khiona returned. "Sorry I ever agreed to give him lodgings. It's all Marya Stepanovna's fault. You know me, I can never refuse anyone a favour."

"Privalov, they say, had his eyes on Nadine Bakhareva."

"D'you really believe that? Nadine Bakhareva! What's Nadine Bakhareva?"

Agrippina sat listening, then suddenly butted in:

"In my opinion Privalov isn't worth a straw. He'll stay here a while, get his inheritance and then leave just as quietly as he came. People talk so much about him that I'm tired of hearing his name."

Khiona was offended. She had never expected her tactics would yield such results. When she went home, she was discontented. Yet the whole thing was plain as day; in spite of their loyal friendship, in spite of their common boarding-school memories, in spite of the hundred or two that Agrippina used to borrow from her bosom friend of a rainy day—in spite of all this Agrippina tried to keep a certain hold on Khiona, though on the surface their relations were most tender and cordial. But this time it was different; in Agrippina's opinion Khiona was holding her nose too high in the air. The worthy lady could not reconcile herself with the thought that Khiona meant to have *soirées* like hers. Besides, Khiona was assuming a lofty manner, and forgetting her place.

"To hell with Privalov," Khiona Zaplatina mused in her solitude, smarting from the stab her boarding-school friend had just inflicted on her pride. "He's a waste of time."

In the meantime, Privalov lost what Khiona described as the remnants of his common sense. Firstly, he struck up a compromising acquaintanceship with a common cattle-dealer, a certain Nagibin, a boor who owned a flour shop and chased pigeons. As though this was not enough, Privalov brought him to his house, treated him to tea, and these tea-parties of theirs lasted almost a fortnight. To top it all, one fine morning after the first few snow-falls, a sleigh drawn by a pair of horses (a pair, mind you!) stopped at Khiona's front door, and the two cronies—Privalov and Nagibin—emerged, dressed in their travelling clothes. But we shall let Khiona relate the subsequent developments in her own words.

"Just think of it, dear Agrippina! I ran to the window and was petrified, absolutely petrified. There was Ipat carrying a small suit-case, which he put in the sleigh. I waited—on the verge of collapse. Privalov climbed into the sleigh, and sat next to that *boor Nagibin*! He drove through the whole town in broad daylight, seen by all, sitting next to him. How d'you like that? Ha-ha-ha! Only then did I realize how much I sacrificed for the sake of that old bigot, Marya Bakhareva. You know me, Agrippina. Yes. That's what came of all my efforts, all my cares, worries, troubles."

The first time Privalov was away for ten days and returned alone, without Nagibin, which somewhat calmed Khiona. But, alas, he had not spent more than a week in Uzel when Nagibin reappeared and took him away again in the same sleigh. Matryona reported to her mistress that Privalov was building a flour mill in the village of Garchiki, some twenty versts from the Laletin spa. Zaplatina took the news impassively, as though Matryo-

na was speaking of some Polar expedition. What Garchiki? What a silly name. Khiona gave her lodger up for lost, and naturally made off at once to seek solace with her one and only bosom friend.

Khiona felt like someone mutilated in a train crash. All her plans were tumbling, her hopes were dashed, leaving a frightening vacuum. At this critical instant, with Zaplatina sitting upon the ruins of her brilliant plans, a fine American sleigh with a bearskin drew up at her door and there emerged . . . Antonida Polovodova, the same Polovodova who for so many years was painfully polite, the same who did not repay her, Khiona's, visit.

"I've come to you, dear Khiona," Polovodova sang out cheerfully while Victor Zaplatin was helping her out of her overcoat. "*Maman* said you weren't quite well, and I decided to see you." Turning to Khiona's husband, she said, "Don't bother please. Thank you."

Khiona was on the verge of tears from sheer excitement and gratitude. Her visitor was elegantly and richly dressed, as usual, with the splendid taste which she inherited from her *maman*. She came in from the cold with crimson cheeks and was contagiously fresh, brimming over with youth and health. A faint streak of hope entered Khiona's parlour with her arrival, and Zaplatina's heart leaped at the thought that perhaps not all was lost.

"Have you heard, Khiona?" Polovodova said gravely. "The Lyakhovskys are throwing a Christmas ball."

"Yes—yes, indeed. They have a ball every Christmas."

"True. But this ball's going to be something special. They've started preparing already, although Christmas is still two months away."

"You don't say!"

"I was wondering," Polovodova began, "if there was some special reason for it. Alexander told me Zosya made a big impression on Privalov."

"Privalov's mad!" Khiona complained. "Stark raving mad!"

Khiona was quite unable to hold back all that had accumulated in her heart. Polovodova listened with a condescending smile, and made no comment.

"Why don't you ever look me up?" she scolded Khiona amiably, while buttoning her Swedish gloves. "How nicely you've decorated your house. I adore simplicity. By the way, Khiona, when are you going to visit me? Alexander is at the bank in the mornings. You don't get along with him, I understand. But that's sheer nonsense. He only looks a snob...."

When, passing through the hall in her silver-fox coat, Polovodova glanced inquisitively at the door to Privalov's apartment, Khiona obligingly opened it and invited her visitor to look round her lodger's rooms.

"This is the guest-room, and there is the study. Come on in, Antonida."

Polovodova peeped in through the door, but hesitated only for an instant. Should she enter, or not? Her self-control triumphed over her consuming curiosity, and she shook her pretty head negatively in reply to Khiona's invitation.

## X

Privalov was introduced to Nagibin, the cattle-dealer, by Vasily Bakharev. The two travelled all over the trans-Urals together, until Privalov picked on Garchiki as a likely site for his projected flour mill. He rented land and instantly launched construction, which meant that he acquired the necessary building materials, hired labourers, etc. Busy with all these matters, Privalov

scarcely noticed how the time flew, making up for the preceding six months of indolence by doing his fill of work.

He came to Uzel only for brief periods, partly to see to his trusteeship affairs, and partly to settle things connected with his flour mill. Nicolas Veryovkin had not, of course, made any headway and was still nursing his "mysterious thread," of which he had hinted to Privalov during their first meeting. But Privalov did not expect any extraordinary results from his solicitor, and evidently allowed the whole affair to run its natural course.

"There must be an end to it one way or another," he said to Veryovkin.

"No, I can't agree with you. Let me plead your case in Petersburg and I'll have the whole lot of them in the palm of my hand."

"No, Nicolas, nothing will come of the trip, believe me," Privalov insisted. "I've spent years in Petersburg all for nothing and can now only regret the wasted time. Let's better sit it out, and wait for fair weather."

"That's no way to do business," Nicolas thought ruefully, chewing his cigar. "Given about fifty thousand rubles I'd tie them all into knots. It's hopeless trying to argue with someone who has his head full of a flour mill. That flour mill is a confounded nuisance, damn it!"

On several occasions, employing devious, cautiously termed speeches, Nicolas tried to impress Privalov with the idea that the goal justified the means. He wanted to give the adversary a taste of his own medicine, certain that in this event success was guaranteed. But Privalov turned a deaf ear to his suggestions, and declared that he would rather lose his inheritance than stoop to the level of his trustees. The finality of his decision discouraged Veryovkin, though he did not lose hope of some day making his opponents "dance."



After everything was ready to launch the actual construction of his flour mill, Privalov departed for the Shatrov Mills.

He neared the cherished Privalov nest on a bright November day, his heart beating violently as the carriage ascended the last elevation, which commanded a view of the mills. It was a mountain view with a narrow, deep lake in the middle. A cluster of wooded islets loomed green at the farther end of the lake, and nearer, on a steep promontory, hundreds of log huts were scattered cheerfully round a white-stone church. A wide dam closed in the lake and linked the promontory with a tree-grown steep hillock, at whose foot the old Privalov mansion rose with its old-fashioned architecture, its time-blackened tall roof and narrow windows. From afar it looked like a citadel, and its windows like embrasures.

Just behind the dam three blast furnaces towered like giant iron boxes, emitting clouds of smoke and large tongues of flame, and still beyond them were several tall smoking iron chimneys. A solid mass of factory buildings, storehouses and windowless structures devoid of smoke-stacks completed the scene. Having turned a great many wheels and gears along the way, the Shatrovka River flowed wide and smooth, its banks lined solidly with the houses of the mill office workers and foremen.

Upon crossing the mill dam, Privalov's carriage stopped before the mansion which at a close distance looked even more forbidding and gloomy.

The stone gates were of the same fortress-like architecture as the house itself; their massive brick posts, or jambs, with tiny wickets, a strong iron grill with projecting sharp spikes, and the gates themselves, made of something like boiler plate, were a most revered antiquity with which one can only meet up in ancient monas-

teries and outdated fortresses. A moat and drawbridge would have made the resemblance to a knightly castle complete.

Two black setters made their appearance through a new, modern portal hewed in the thick exterior wall. Wagging their shaggy tails and clanking their copper collars they sniffed round Privalov in a most amicable fashion as he climbed out of his carriage and then felt his way along the narrow dark hallway.

"Is the master home?" he asked for Konstantin Bakharev when a girl appeared at the door in a starched white apron.

"No, he's at the mill," the girl replied archly, helping the visitor out of his heavy deerskin coat. "Who shall I say is asking?"

"Privalov."

The maid dropped the coat, looked at Sergei for an instant as if he had just risen from the dead, and vanished.

Just at this time a stocky, solid gentleman of medium height, in a chamois Romanov coat and a black lamb-skin hat was walking unhurriedly down the drive. He entered the hallway and flung off his coat without noticing the visitor.

"Konstantin!"

"Oh, it's you," Konstantin uttered in measured tones, as though he had only just seen Privalov the day before. "Well, so you've come at last? I've had enough waiting. Well, glad to see you!"

The two boyhood friends shook hands and, after a moment's hesitation, kissed each other on the cheek after the Russian fashion. Privalov surveyed Konstantin's stocky, somewhat bent frame with a sense of elation, taking in his rust-coloured sleeveless cloth jacket, his black baggy trousers tucked into his riding boots, and his broad

Russian visage with its thick golden beard and squinting eyes. Konstantin was the same old Konstantin, from his short-cropped hair to his rust-coloured jacket. There are people in whom the quality we call beauty is totally superfluous. Konstantin Bakharev was that sort of a man.

They walked to Konstantin's study through a long low-ceilinged guest-room with narrow windows. The study was a square room separated by a glass door from the dining-room, in which Privalov glimpsed the white apron of the maid. The study was arranged in a business-like manner; a large writing-desk occupied the middle of the room, a work-bench stood near the window and a lathe machine in the corner, while several cupboards lined the inner wall. A deep, old-fashioned shagreen sofa, which served its master as a bed, stood between the stove and the window. Rolled up plans and drafts, parts of wooden dummies, samples of iron ore and pig-iron, and many other attributes of the iron-making trade, were piled on the desk alongside various papers and account-books. All this—the desk, the work-bench, the windows and the floor—was abundantly sprinkled with cigar ash, and littered with cigarette-stubs.

"I've quarrelled with the old man," Privalov muttered dubiously to end the uneasy silence.

"Yes, I know," Konstantin replied curtly, walking up and down his study. "Nadine wrote me."

"Have you heard his affairs are in a bad way?"

"Yes. But he'll put them right," young Bakharev uttered, as if to hearten Privalov.

"Of course he will. But he's having a hard time of it just now."

Speaking of Vasily Bakharev's affairs, Privalov told his old friend about the sudden arrival in Uzel of Danila Shelekhov.

"Father's affairs must be in a sad havoc if Danila came all the way from the mines," Konstantin remarked, smiling ruefully.

He cleared a corner of his writing-desk, where the maid placed a boiling samovar. He spoke of the trusteeship and the trustees. Privalov briefly outlined his impression of Lyakhovsky and Polovodov, and then told Konstantin that he was building a flour mill.

"I know. Well, more power to you. It seems to me, Nadine wrote something about a mill." Konstantin searched his memory, pouring out the tea.

The two boyhood friends looked askance at each other. Privalov well knew this composed, icy tone of Konstantin's. There was not a shadow of doubt that young Bakharev disapproved of Privalov's plans.

"I can't for the life of me see," Konstantin uttered after a lengthy pause, "why you're carrying on with the trusteeship affair."

"What d'you mean?"

"Nothing. But you've evidently given up the Shatrov Mills. Well, they couldn't be worse off if they fell into other hands."

"No, I haven't given them up. To tell you the truth, I'm not trying for myself."

"I know," Konstantin returned, "and so much the worse for the mills. Philanthropic ideas never lead to anything."

"You don't even know my philanthropic ideas."

"Nor do I want to know them. Isn't it enough that you are giving up the mills?"

"The point is, however, that I don't even have the privilege of giving them up."

"That silly notion again," Konstantin raised his voice, and added more quietly, "sorry to put it bluntly. To my mind, the question shouldn't even arise.... Your chasing two hares at once is quite beyond me."

"Please, let's talk about it some other time."

"All right. Anyway, I think I've said everything I wanted to say."

Konstantin Bakharev was as much of an enthusiast of the iron and steel trade as his father, Vasily Bakharev, was of gold-mining. They were men of a similar stamp, which, very likely, was why they failed to see eye to eye. Konstantin had eyes only for the mills, while Privalov suffered the everlasting torment of an immature mind, which sought for an opening and always failed to find one.

The two spoke of various trifles and experienced the awkwardness of two entire strangers burdened with the task of conversing. Their efforts were not particularly successful.

"Do you want to see the mills?" Konstantin suggested after tea.

"Yes, very much," said Privalov.

It was a stone's throw from the mansion to the mill. They crossed a small quadrangle lined with a dozen wooden stalls and shops. Privalov had not the faintest idea how iron and steel was made, and tramped from shop to shop more out of politeness than anything else, fearing to offend Konstantin. He found nothing of interest to himself in the badly-lit draughty buildings full of labourers with seamed, emaciated faces; the splash of water, the smothered thunder of dozens of revolving wheels, gears and drums; and the blinding flare of the puddling, welding, reverberatory and God knows what other furnaces. Molten metal was everywhere. Black smoke rose from the giant chimneys. Konstantin, coming to life, offered a most minute description of the newly-installed roller machine whose steel drums, he attested, were machined in a most extraordinary way. To show Privalov how it worked he had several bars of section iron rolled on the machine. Privalov watched a rough-cast shaped

like an elongated brick pass between the rolls, turning gradually into a long, thin section which bent under its own weight and shed a shower of sparks.

"Let's look at the water-wheel," Konstantin suggested, leading the way into a newly-built log house.

They inspected the wheel, which revolved with a smothered rumble and made the whole factory shake. Privalov patted the copper bearing of the axle and soiled his hands with grease. This brought a grin to Konstantin's lips. The dam keeper and foreman exchanged sly glances.

Then they went over to the Siemens-Martin furnace and cupola, and approached the blast furnaces, in which a sea of fire crackled and hissed noisily, and showers of sparks burst skyward. They met the same singed faces, the same leather aprons and soft felt boots wherever they went. Privalov felt a total stranger in this realm of fire and iron, an outsider who speechlessly inspected everything he was shown. He avoided asking questions, lest the workmen discover his ignorance. In the meantime, the news of his arrival spread through the plants. Groups of curious onlookers gathered here and there, and eyes were fixed on him from every nook and cranny. Privalov had no wish to serve as the centre of attraction for all these hundreds of people and suggested that they turn back, claiming that he was hungry.

"Aye, fine words butter no parsnips," Konstantin nodded. "It slipped my mind that you've just made a long trip, and that it's my bounden duty to minister to your appetite."

Privalov heaved a sigh of relief when they left the mill, where even the snow was covered with soot and dust and everything breathed fire and smoke.

## XI

The hours between lunch and night-fall slipped through their fingers somehow, peppered with snatches of conversation, with which the two boyhood friends vainly tried to fill the rift that had formed between them during their parting.

Before going to bed, Privalov was obliged to listen patiently to many most interesting things about the iron and steel industry. Once Konstantin was on his hobby-horse it was almost impossible to silence him, and Privalov made up his mind to hear him out for all future time. Like all men enthralled by their own ideas, Konstantin refused to notice his friend's perfidy and unloaded his ample supply of diverse projects, innovations and reforms between sips of porter. There was enough of everything—narrow-gauge railways that would with time traverse the entire Shatrov Mills district; the Bessemer process of steel manufacture which he planned to introduce; the substitution of mineral fuel for firewood; and hot air blasting to "recover gases and utilize waste heat," etc. Privalov tried to concentrate on some of the projects, but failed miserably and merely watched Konstantin's face turning a deeper red and his eyes narrowing as his account progressed.

The boyhood friends went to their respective rooms with the ice unbroken. Privalov was put up in a corner chamber, whose two windows overlooked the garden. It was at once a study and a bedroom. A small writing-desk stood between the windows, a plain iron bed by the inner wall, a night-table beside it, and a shelf of books in the corner. Flowers on the window-sills lent the room the appearance of a monk's cell. Privalov was pleased with its simplicity. A leather-bound notebook lay on the desk, flanked by two little flower vases. His eye caught an abandoned piece of sewing with the needle stuck into it.

"Nadine's," Konstantin explained. "She always has this room when she comes—its windows open into the garden. Perhaps you don't like it here? You could be moved to the front rooms, but they're disgustingly desolate."

"No, no," Privalov remonstrated. "This'll do splendidly."

Konstantin left. Privalov undressed and went to bed. He lay long with eyes wide open, just a single thought gnawing painfully at his brain: here, in this room, this very room—Nadine. Yes, she sat here with her sewing. Here she did her thinking. Here she laughed, her hands opened these windows, and she watered these very flowers in the mornings. He began to think differently of the cold thick walls about him, as though Nadine's presence had warmed them, the same Nadine for whom his heart ached so. Nadine, dear Nadine—so pure, so good, who perhaps lived through the buoyant transports of first love right here, in this very room, thinking of him, of Loskutov, while gazing out of this very window, or when watering the flowers. Here she read his letters, here recalled the precious moments of their meetings, here dreamt her golden dreams and cherished the happy minutes of budding love. Here she gave him tender nicknames, here she smiled to him in her sleep, whispering words of love as she stretched her arms to him. Wonderful dreams and unbounded poetry go hand in hand with pain and suffering.

Privalov tried to forget her. He tried not to think of her. Yet he felt his love for her grow with each passing day. He knew that he loved her with a kind of crazed despair.

The heir to the Privalov fortune fell into a heavy, restless sleep in the keep of his forefathers. He saw visions of his ancestors, whose shadows filled the old mansion, staring in surprise at their last offspring. Privalov saw them



and cringed from them in fear. He groaned in his sleep and his lips whispered, "I want nothing of yours—not a single thing. Your millions weigh heavily upon me."

## XII

Next morning Privalov rose with a headache.

Breakfast was served in the dining-room. The first thing he saw on entering it was a gentleman reading a book, elbows propped on the table. Privalov had a side view of him and did not at first make out who it was.

"Ah, Maxim!" Konstantin cried out cheerfully.

Privalov started at the sound of the name. It was Loskutov. He did not rise to greet the host, nodding his head to Konstantin with the smile of a frequent visitor, and went back to his reading.

"Allow me to introduce . . ." Konstantin began.

"We've met," Privalov interrupted, hastily offering his hand to his lucky rival.

"Yes, yes," Loskutov drawled, raising his eyes to Privalov, "we met at the Lyakhovskys'."

At first Privalov was confused, fearing to betray his emotions. Loskutov, meanwhile, was as collected and cool as ever, and apparently took no notice of Privalov.

Strange as it may seem, it was due to Loskutov's presence that the day passed in high spirits. There are times when a third person is as essential as the unknown X, which helps solve problems in mathematics. Privalov could not help comparing the day before with the present. There was no trace of the preceding day's stiffness. He also noticed that his own words came with ease and unconcern about things which he had tried to avoid the day before, and again all due to Loskutov's presence.

"You know, Sergei Alexandrovich," Loskutov said to him in his plain, confident tone, "your plans have all my

sympathies. It surprises me how people like Konstantin can be so indifferent to them."

At last, here was a man who sided with him openly! And it had to be his rival.

Heated discussions on all possible subjects took up the evening in Konstantin's study. The maid had her hands full substituting fresh bottles for emptied ones. The men were flushed, their eyes sparkled. The atmosphere was sincere and cordial, as in the days of their green youth. Each spoke his mind without subterfuges.

"You're a dreamer, a utopian, whatever you say," Konstantin declared, slapping Privalov's back.

"No. The very reverse. It's you who is absorbed in fantasies and refuses to see real things," Privalov objected.

Privalov was a poor speaker, but at this moment he defended his ideas with unusual clarity and logic.

"I have nothing against industry in general, and the iron industry in particular," he declared, waving his arms. "But only in theory, or in respect to the West. As for Russian industry, I'm against it. It's a malignant tumour nourished at the expense of the people. The Urals mining industry developed upon monstrous privileges and monopolies, the forced labour of millions of men and the most flagrant exploitation of purely national wealth, which leads us to the sad conclusion that the Urals with all their inexhaustible riches cost the government a dozen times more than the benefits they have yielded. Furthermore, all the government's sacrifices will not yield benefits in the future either, because our mills and factories will fold up as soon as the government ceases to nurse them. The moment the government lifts the tariff on imported materials, the moment it puts an end to the plunder of crown forests by the industrialists, as soon as it taxes their production as it taxes the labours of a muzhik—the moment it does, all will perish."

"But the government did not invest money for personal profit. It helped develop the key industries," Bakharov argued. "Take England, France, America—it's the same everywhere. At first the government and the nation unquestionably were the losers in the protective policy, but they were later repaid a hundredfold, and succeeded in putting their industry in the world market."

"That's quite true for all the countries you mentioned," Privalov continued, "but in our case the result is quite different. Our protective policy only created a generation of state paupers who scarcely make ends meet while straddling fabulous treasures. The result we get in Russia is quite the opposite, as you see. Instead of developing mining and industry we block their progress by setting up a monstrous monopoly."

"You forget," Konstantin observed, "that you are an industrialist yourself."

"No, I never forget it. That's just why I must decide what I am—and the other industrialists. We are parasites."

"But who prevents you from not being parasites?"

"That's something else again and I'll try to go into it as fully as I can."

Privalov sketched an exhaustive picture of the Ural industrialists, most of whom had never even seen their mills. The protective policy assured them million-ruble profits for all time, and things at the mills were done by proxy, through managers, solicitors and agents. Generation after generation lived off the fat of the land in complete indolence, and it leaped to the eye how the sturdiest of families degenerated. It required a superhuman effort to tear oneself free from this system of parasitism nurtured for a hundred and fifty years. The existing traditions of industry will have to be smashed to their foundations.

"Well, why don't you start a reform?" Konstantin uttered. "You have enough idle time, I imagine."

"I don't think I'm strong enough. Why tackle something I could not see through? Furthermore, all in all, I am against the idea of artificially cultivating industry. Look into it, and you'll see that it brought us nothing but harm."

"If you had it your way, we'd close down the mills and return to the stone age," Konstantin said sarcastically.

"The point is that we industrialists are not even at liberty to close down the mills. The fate of 500,000 people, to whom we owe a debt all round, is intimately linked with them. Whose labour built the mills? And whose land do they stand on?"

"It's too late to raise that issue."

"No, this is just the right time," Privalov insisted. "Because a real landless proletariat will grow up in the mills in the near future, and that will be worse than serfdom."

### XIII

For several days Privalov and Konstantin were busy with various mill affairs. They looked through piles of papers, estimates, reports and statements. At first Privalov did not like the work, but was drawn into it imperceptibly as the shape of real things stared at him from the sheets of paper. But working at one and the same thing, often at one and the same desk, the two boyhood friends saw matters each in his own way.

First came the story of the charter regulating relations between the landlord and his liberated serfs, which dated from the time of Sashka Kholostov's trusteeship. The charter was obviously the handiwork of a shrewd pettifogging clerk. Twenty years after it was drawn up one could only marvel at the perspicacity and insight of its nameless author. It foresaw and forewarned every little

thing with a thousand provisions and stipulations. Naturally, the clerk was acting on behalf of Kholostov, at Kholostov's expense, and all the benefits and advantages were in favour of the mill. The centre of gravity lay on matters connected with the land plots granted to the freed peasants by their masters, and the article dealing with them was particularly thorough. The upshot was a population of forty thousand left landless, whose very existence depended entirely on the fatal formula, "Until further notice."

Then they came upon the twenty-year-old story of muzhik hardships caused by the charter, which was signed by a group of "elders."

Some complaisant old men, acting on behalf of the community, had put their names to the document after a relevant share of alcohol. This started the trouble. The workmen and peasants tried all possible means to prove the injustice of the charter, claiming that the old men had never been authorized to sign it. The affair dragged on from year to year. The muzhiks hired lawyers, sent petitioners to the governor, argued and raged at the justice of the peace, but made no progress whatsoever.

"We've got to put an end to the affair," Privalov said, scanning the documents. "The charter was drawn up incorrectly."

"Yes, but it all depends on the trustees."

"What'll the trustees say" and "it all depends on the trustees" were phrases that stuck in Privalov's throat. Never before had he wished as fervently to be done with the trusteeship at all costs.

The unusual affair with the Bashkir lands hedged in by the Shatrov Mills as far back as the late eighteenth century also came to light. It turned out that the case had dragged on at intervals for a full hundred years, and two generations of plaintiffs had died and were born in

that period. In his zeal the obliging land-surveyor had hedged in the entire Bashkir village of Bukhtarma; another zealot, an intermediary, had on his own responsibility converted an entire Bashkir *volost* from the category of a patrimonial estate to that of *pripushchenniki*, which meant that it received fifteen instead of thirty dessiatines. The rest of the dessiatines went to the mill, and partly to minor landholders. This was a weak point in the case. The chief difficulty arose when no one could be found to even approximate the hedges and boundaries that were the object of the litigation. In the records they were indicated as stretching "from the land of Sukhoi Pal to the birch grove," or, which was more confusing, "to such-and-such a stone or the old stump." No trace remained of the birch grove, the stone, or stump, and as for Sukhoi Pal—both sides sought to prove their own case. The difference was almost fifty versts. Meanwhile, the village of Bukhtarma had fallen prey to fire no less than a dozen times in the course of the hundred years, and its population had long since turned into a hungry, miserable mob.

"What are we going to do?" Privalov asked the frowning Konstantin several times.

"There's absolutely nothing we can do now," the latter replied. "The infernal trusteeship has us tied hand and foot. It'll be different when the mills settle their debts. We'll give the Bashkirs their fifteen dessiatines, and be done with it."

"Yes, but not all of the land belongs to the mills, does it?"

"Well, see how much of it does."

A touch of drama was added to the disgusting affair when a delegation of Bashkirs made its appearance at the Shatrov Mills. These children of sunny Bashkiria had learnt that the master himself had come to the mills, and hastened there to claim their due again.

Privalov was stunned by the sight of this steppeland misery, much unlike the poverty we are accustomed to see in Russian cities, towns and villages. Civilized poverty begs for alms, using words, postures, gestures of the hand, glances, and, last but not least, rags. It begs because there is still hope left in it for better time to come. It was different with the Bashkirs—their bronzed, emaciated faces with dark slits instead of eyes, looking at you in blank despair, gestures bound by dull apathy, a purely Eastern fatalism imprinted in each wrinkle of their shabby rags. "Such is the will of Allah," were the fateful words reigning under the torn fur caps. A kind of oppressive greatness wafted from this steppeland philosophy evolved down the centuries and eloquently illustrated by the events of the past two hundred years.

They mumbled words in a bastard Russian which Privalov could scarcely make out, gleaning only the fact that the overseer had given them the stick. Only two old men, who were horse-breeders, stood out among this wretched cluster of misery, doomed to extinction, as science puts it, by more virile civilization. One of them, Koshgilda by name, was about sixty, broad-shouldered, deep-chested, and with a little cropped grey beard. The other was a wiry, wrinkled, almost entirely withered individual with a thin neck and short-sighted, watery eyes. He was called Urukai. The old men bore themselves with the in-born grace of true steppe dwellers. They still faintly remembered the free-and-easy times long since past, when hundreds of families trekked to their summer camps after the cold, hungry winters. The steppe was free then. Men and horses rested well in the warm months. But that was "all over," as the more talkative Koshgilda put it.

"Here they are, the historic enemies, whose sieges my forebears withstood in this very mansion," Privalov thought, eyes fixed on the Bashkirs. "They do not even

know of the proud time when Bashkirs fought bitterly with the first Russian settlers and repeatedly routed the troops sent against them. Here it is, this relentless philosophy of history!"

For several days the Bashkirs were fed in the kitchen of the mansion. Privalov and Konstantin did their best to dig up all the papers related to their case. A few scraps of information was all they got for their labours. Yet they managed to decipher the land-surveyor's signature on one of the papers, and it turned out to be Victor Zaplatin's.

"Splendid," Privalov rejoiced. "That's my landlord in Uzel. I can get all the necessary information from him, and perhaps even the records we want."

"I hope you can."

When the Bashkirs were finally told that the master would soon go to town and would there present their case, they accepted the news with stolid grief, went silently out into the open, mounted their horses and started for their native Bukhtarma without a word. Privalov's eye long followed the wretched men heading for certain death, and his heart bled for them. But what could he do to help them in his absurd position?

Hungry Bukhtarma visited him in his dreams that night. He saw ragged, famished women, and emaciated, hunger-stricken children. They did not stretch their little hands out to him. Nor did they plead, or cry. Only Urukai's long neck had become longer still, and words of reproach fell from his lips.

"Our land now your land," Urukai groaned, closing his watery Mongol eyes. "All yours, nothing ours. All die. Urukai also die."

Privalov started out of his sleep, beads of perspiration glistening on his brow.



## XIV

Privalov spent about a fortnight in assiduous work at the Shatrov Mills. There were a few idle hours in the evenings only, when he and Konstantin interminably discussed all subjects under the sun.

Loskutov went to the mines for a few days, and came back. The mines closed down for the winter, and he had all the free time he wanted. In spite of himself Privalov grew accustomed to the company of this peculiar individual, so very different from other people. Occasionally an unguarded word shattered Privalov's peace of mind, and he again experienced a sense of profound prejudice against his rival.

"He's an exceptional character, you know, absolutely exceptional," Konstantin said of Loskutov. "Quite out of this world. I've known him for years, but can't make him out. Yet there's the feeling of dealing with someone big. Strength tells, you know."

"Lyakhovsky spoke to me about him," Privalov confided. "He respects him highly as a philosopher and scholar."

"Indeed, that side of him is easier to make out. But he has another, extraordinary, side. I'd call it magnetism, or power of attraction. No, seriously. You get to feel better and cleverer yourself when you're with him. Perhaps that's the secret of his power."

"What d'you think he represents?"

"Loskutov? Hm. I think he's a man born out of his time," Konstantin said. "He feels trapped, and has buried himself in books. But he could have been a big man in different circumstances. He has singleness of purpose—a certain fanaticism. He's the kind of man people willingly die for."

Loskutov remained a puzzle to Privalov. On the one hand, he won Privalov with his childlike simplicity, as

he had won Konstantin with his singleness of purpose and Lyakhovsky with his intelligence. On the other hand, Privalov was repelled by the trace of mysticism in his utterances. Scrutinizing his features, Privalov was sometimes nauseated and grieved. At times, Loskutov's presence became unbearable, and he either went to the mill or locked himself in his room for hours on end. "If you really love her," a voice inside him whispered, "you'll get to love him as well, because she's happy with him, because she loves him." Anguish kept him awake nights, thinking the same thing over and over again. Nadine and Loskutov were the two fateful poles, all Privalov's thoughts revolved around them with sickening persistence.

Loskutov, for his part, treated Privalov with marked respect. He listened to his plans with unconcealed pleasure. At times, Privalov sensed his penetrating eyes fixed upon him with mute curiosity.

"You know, Sergei Alexandrovich," Loskutov told him one day when they were alone in Konstantin's study, "I envy you your position."

"In what way?" Privalov asked in surprise.

"In many ways. You have a mountain of hard work in front of you. But that is just one side of it—the dark side, which is simply compensated by the main idea. To begin with, you have no illusions about your relation to the mills. What is more, if only half of what you intend is destined to succeed, the Shatrov Mills will be a splendid example to others."

"True. But the proverbial road to hell, you know, is paved with good intentions," Privalov observed wryly. "It may come to nothing if we fail to clean up the mess with the trusteeship."

"Hm. Possibly," Loskutov mused. "But you have your own undertaking in reserve—I mean the idea of organizing wheat sales on a rational basis. That alone will help

you save thousands of people from the toils of the budding bourgeoisie. I realize that every new undertaking, particularly in the sphere of practical interests, must surmount a great many obstacles, even failures, but the great thing is to begin. Adherents and successors are easily found. In my opinion, you couldn't have picked a better time for your undertaking; society is in a state of ferment from top to bottom, and it is particularly important to inject a new stream into this laboratory of life in creation. Attempts of the same kind have been made before, but I view your project in relation with the present, with the place you chose, and the means you possess."

One day, when Privalov had retired to his room after dinner and was thumbing through the latest issue of a journal, someone knocked softly at the door.

"Have you gone to bed?" a voice whispered, which he recognized as Loskutov's.

"No, come in," Privalov replied.

"I'm not sleepy, and Konstantin has gone to the mills. Let's sit up and chat a bit."

"By all means."

Loskutov made himself comfortable on the small oil-skin sofa and unhurriedly lit a cigarette.

"What's he after?" Privalov wondered. He felt sure that Loskutov's was not an idle visit.

"I want to talk to you," Loskutov stated, exhaling a cloud of bluish smoke. "Perhaps you're not in the mood? Tell me, I shan't hold it against you."

"No, by all means."

Loskutov crushed the cigarette in the ash-tray, walked up and down the room and, turning abruptly on his heels, seated himself at Privalov's side, speaking deliberately.

"I've given your plans serious thought," he began, "and the more I think about them, the more a certain question bothers me. Your plans have everything: they're

original, sincere, perfectly feasible. But they have a terrible fault: they depend on a single individual. Their future is guaranteed only by their form. That's precisely what I am driving at. You count chiefly on the form of your undertaking. But what happens when you are gone? Or give it up for some reason? I'll try to make myself clear. Faith in the triumph of form has been shaken even among its most ardent supporters, because form is just a palliative which lulls our senses and makes us shut our eyes to all the continuing evil. It seems to me that the success of an undertaking depends above all on the organic education of all concerned. That's why I think it would be better to begin with organic education, and let form take shape in due time. It is a slower—but surer—road. You will confront the organized force of exploitation on the one hand, and on the other the passive resistance of those very masses whom you seek to benefit. There will be misunderstandings, mutual mistrust, petty artifices and outright cheating. I think it's best to begin with organic education."

"You forget that time won't wait, we'll miss our chance then. The form of my undertaking will serve as the scaffolding for a time, and also as a school. Time and circumstance will show us what to do later—what to change and what to give up."

"Yes, but it's a slippery road."

"Yet we must take it for want of a better one," Privolov insisted.

Loskutov spoke about his idea of systematic education. It was all a matter of economic forces, he said, and the pattern of social life. Yet it was all a mere manifestation, the outer shell, the basis of the moving force which was not outside, but inside, man. World history had proved over and over that forms which fought evil with its own weapons were absolutely impracticable. There was need, he continued, to devote attention to the moral forces,

which until now most reformers had neglected. It was moral forces alone that could create something truly lasting.

"But how are you going to utilize them?" Privalov inquired. "There must again be form—a certain kind of organization."

"Precisely. Only in this case form would only be a means, while the centre of gravity would shift from economic interests to moral forces. Organization would in no way play the role it plays in pursuing economic interests. How to explain our continued and stubborn sectarianism, for instance? The formal side of the matter is only superficial, and it's the moral incentives that are important."

Loskutov had a gleam in his eyes. He sighed heavily after he made his parting tirade, as though a load had fallen from his shoulders.

## XV

At the Lyakhovskys', preparations for the ball were in full swing. It was annually held on January 4th, which was Zosya's birthday. All Uzel society gathered at the ball and Lyakhovsky played the part of a most hospitable and kind host.

The festive hustle and bustle which preceded that year's ball betrayed the intention to stage something quite out of the ordinary. The omnipresent Alfons Bogdanich rolled like a rubber ball through all the chambers. He heard everything, saw everything and tongue-lashed everybody. He stepped out of the role of servitor and menial carrying out his master's orders, and stepped into that of a genuine enthusiast. The forthcoming "fun" was a serious business to him, which required profound consideration and many "bright ideas," as he put it. Hun-

dreds of times daily he referred to Zosya for these bright ideas, addressing her reverently:

"If Miss Zosya won't give me advice, I'm lost. Miss Zosya has excellent taste, heavenly taste. And an eye—a sharp, young eye. I'd have to ponder a week, while Miss Zosya has only to open her little mouth and...."

But he did not confine himself to Zosya alone. He would roll precipitously down the stairs to the chambers of Pani Marina and David. Admittedly, Pani Marina had a great love for Russian vodka, but she had not forgotten how she danced with the moustachioed Sangushko, and knew all about décor and entertainment. Haughty and insolent with Pani Marina at all other times, Alfons Bogdanich was now all courtesy, and finally achieved his ends.

Pani Marina, once tall and beautiful, was now a wretched ruin. Her flabby face, the pouches under her eyes, her red nose, the turbid, blank look of her big black eyes, and her trembling hands, spoke eloquently of what Marina did in her five rooms, which in the bygone days of the Privalovs served to shelter an escaped prelate. The rooms were furnished by the practical-minded Alfons Bogdanich with various odds and ends. The odd pieces of furniture, the faded drapery and the time-worn carpets on the floor—all testified to Alfons' genius of producing something from nothing.

"Just one word, Pani Marina," he would say, "or I'm lost. Just one word. Pani knows everything, pani has seen everything; she need only utter a word and we'll be saved."

He would approach her on tiptoe with a mysterious expression on his face, bring his mouth to her ear and whisper flatteringly and sweetly:

"Oh, Pani Marina! Everybody knows you're the most beautiful woman in all Poland! Yes, and you danced the mazurka best of all, and dressed better than the others,

and everybody was simply crazy about you. Pani Marina's angry with me, but I'm a nobody and did only what my master bid me."

After this overture Pani Marina would finally surrender and Alfons Bogdanich obtained all the information he needed from her. They spoke for hours in the friendliest fashion, like the best of friends, and Pani Marina was in raptures examining samples of the material he had brought with him for her consideration and listening to his plans of the entertainment.

"We'll open the ball with Oginski's polonaise," he reported, fidgeting in his chair. "Miss Zosya will wear a dress of yellow satin. And we're having a young Polish nobleman come from Siberia to dance with her; you should see him dance!"

Pani Marina's eyebrows rose inquiringly, and Alfons Bogdanich made hurried amends:

"Oh, of course, he isn't as good as Pani Marina's young men, but the master wants to see a real mazurka, a mazurka by Khlopitsky, you know—not by Kontsky, but Khlopitsky. Miss Zosya has no inkling of the young man. It's a surprise, all a surprise, everywhere a surprise."

The news enlivened Pani Marina. She thought with profound sympathy of Alfons Bogdanich's bright idea and promised to help him in every possible way.

Miss Zosya did not refuse to help, when asked, but had something quite different on her mind. She scarcely ever left her rooms and was unusually pensive. The doctor, naturally, was the first to notice this change in her, and watched his pupil solicitously.

"You ought to spend two or three hours daily in the fresh air," he said to her.

"All right," Zosya replied listlessly. "But tell me, how's Nadine? Is it long since you saw her?"

Zosya had lately become unusually attentive to Nadine and often visited her to chat, or take her for a drive. It was a novelty with her, and the doctor could not fail to notice that in many things Zosya tried to imitate Nadine, particularly in the way she appointed her room, which was now littered with books, serious prints and new furniture, modest to the extreme and also "serious."

There were just two things Zosya did not give up—her horses and the thousand expensive useless little knick-knacks that adorned all the tables, cupboards and even the window-sills. The alterations she made in her room produced some ludicrous incongruities. Darwin's portrait, for instance, was hung beside that of an English race horse, and under Schiller's bust was the portrait of an English jockey, etc. The windows of Zosya's room opened into the courtyard north of the mansion, but no one could induce her to move to another, brighter and pleasanter room, because from it Zosya could see everything going on in the yard, meaning her horses.

"You've changed," the doctor ventured cautiously.

"Yes, it's about time I stopped skipping on one leg," Zosya snapped irreverently, but instantly made amends: "A thousand pardons, dear doctor. I always seem so ungrateful. You will pardon me, won't you?"

"Nerves," the doctor thought to himself, trying vainly to think of some way to stimulate the girl.

Zosya would come to life all on her own whenever Loskutov came. In winter he was often in Uzel, and frequently called at the Lyakhovskys'. Zosya's father kept telling her, "That's a rare bird—very rare. An extremely clever bird too. I wish you'd be close friends. Association with clever people is the best possible school." Zosya took advantage of her father's wish in her own way, and showed unusual exuberance in Loskutov's presence. The philosopher amused her. In his presence she cast off her



air of boredom. Sometimes Nadine was present too, and the three of them had a wonderful time.

Polovodov and Victor Bakharev paid several visits to Zosya and tried to reclaim her, but failed. Zosya was bored in their presence, and Victor finally concluded that she had "turned sour." It was not as easy to get rid of Polovodov, because in certain things he was tenacious enough to stalk a person for months. He read serious articles and even peeped into scholarly volumes in his free time to keep in step with Zosya's new inclinations. He was moved by hurt vanity, because, like all petty egoists, he could not bear to be outrivalled, and was ready to jump out of his skin to take the upper hand. But this time his efforts were futile, because he knew as little of philosophy as of, say, Sanskrit.

"The girl is touched," the martyr of science groaned, racking his brains over a volume of Schopenhauer. "Couldn't she pick something more worth while? Pfui! What she needs is a husband; she's gone mad, that's all."

Zosya naturally had long since noticed Polovodov's noble effort, which fact only stimulated her predilection for the unsuspecting Loskutov. He licked Polovodov point by point every time the latter tried a sally into the domains of science. Even Polovodov's sophisms and daring *bons mots* did no good, and Zosya laughed merrily whenever Polovodov beat a retreat.

A few days before the ball Zosya told the doctor she wanted Loskutov to be among the guests. Her tone brooked no refusal.

"I can't promise," the doctor tried to argue. "You know perfectly well that Loskutov does not like noisy company and never goes to balls. I couldn't very well use force, Zosya."

"Why don't you admit that you simply don't want to do what I ask you?" Zosya insisted with her usual

mulishness. "I'll ask Polovodov to see to it—or Alfons Bogdanich."

"Very well," the doctor surrendered, "I'll tell Loskutov your special wish."

"That's why I like you so, doctor," Zosya responded instantly. "How and when shall I thank you? I'll embroider something for you."

"That's all very well," the doctor said gravely, "but I can't make you out at all. We may appear importunate. It's just a childish whim."

"Let's presume that it is. But if I want it, doctor?"

The doctor shrugged his shoulders and Zosya pouted angrily.

"All right, have it your own way, doctor. I shan't extend any special invitation to him, but I'm ready to bet that he'll come to the ball. D'you hear? He'll come! Let's bet: I'll embroider a fez for you if I lose, and you—you'll give me the terra-cotta statuette of the child pulling the stocking off its foot. Remember? D'you accept the terms?"

"Splendid," the doctor agreed, offering her his hand. Looking intently at Zosya's widened pupils, he thought: "No, it's not merely nerves. It's something far more serious."

The uproar which involved the denizens of the old Privalov mansion before the ball, did not somehow affect the master himself. He had his hands full with other things. Nicolas Veryovkin's carriage was seen at his door almost every day, spilling out the heavy Nicolas, who took his bulky "constitution" up to the first floor, bursting into Lyakhovsky's study like a regular bear.

"How's the most precious health of my most precious host?" he would boom sardonically, shaking Lyakhovsky's withered hand.

"Oh, you again!" Lyakhovsky would exclaim with feigned surprise, and would then wail in a feminine voice,

holding his head: "Bothering the life out of me. You're going to be the death of me. You'll drive me crazy with this infernal case! That's certain! I feel a vacuum in my head already."

"As long as it's in the head—that's only half bad," Nicolas cracked, making himself comfortable in the arm-chair like someone who has come to his own room. "As for the case, let's get on with it."

"But I've told you that I know nothing. Polovodov has all the papers, ask him."

"Polovodov says the contrary. He says the papers about the land allotted to the workmen of the Shatrov Mills, and those about the hedging in of the Bashkir possessions, are in your hands."

"No, no. I have nothing," Lyakhovsky mumbled, crest-fallen, a bird-like expression appearing in his face.

"And I say you do."

"Haven't I told you that I don't have the papers?" Lyakhovsky groaned.

"And I repeat that you do. I won't budge out of this chair until you show them to me."

"You're bullying me! In broad daylight!" Lyakhovsky screamed, strutting up and down the room.

Veryovkin calmly smoked his cigar, waiting until the outburst would subside. After some thirty minutes of this Lyakhovsky would suddenly stop in his tracks and announce cheerfully, like one who had stumbled upon a long-lost object:

"The infernal documents are at Mokhov, in the Court of Wards. Yes, yes. I recall it now. Very clearly."

Instead of replying, Veryovkin produced a notification of the Mokhov Court, numbered 1348, to the effect that the desired documents were not in its possession. Lyakhovsky read and reread the letter, squinting over his spectacles, holding the notification to the light to see if there were any erasures, and finally declared:

"You must have written this yourself, Nicolas."

"You must think I'm an absolute ass. Show me the register of the papers and documents you received when you assumed the trusteeship."

"What register?" Lyakhovsky snapped.

"Aren't you the trustee?"

"Yes. Ah, you must ask Vasily Bakharev. He ought to know."

"He says you have all the papers."

"Impossible. You misunderstood him."

They played this game day in and day out in the course of three months. At first Privalov had tried himself to wrest the papers from Lyakhovsky, then gave it up and deputed Nicolas Veryovkin. Lyakhovsky went so far as to try and hide from the solicitor, rushing out into the garden or the stables in his cotton-lined coat and slippers. The manoeuvre saved him several times from Nicolas's attacks, until the latter thought of a trick of his own. He would ring the bell at the door and then, before Palka opened it, gallop round the house to the back where he pounced upon his prey just as Lyakhovsky tried to make his escape across the yard.

"We'll make it hot for you," Veryovkin warned a few days before the ball. "Better give in while the giving's still good."

"Look here," Lyakhovsky pleaded, "why doesn't Privalov approach me personally? We could find common ground."

"But he has approached you—a dozen times. He's put the matter into my hands now and wants it settled without further delay. Without d-e-l-a-y, d'you hear? It's high time to stop the horseplay. Besides, Privalov is out of town. He's gone to his mill."

In the evenings, in Lyakhovsky's study, the host used to say to Polovodov in a tired voice:

"I can't stand it any longer; this Veryovkin sticks like a leach."

"Bear it just a bit more," Polovodov insisted, stretching his long limbs. "The most important thing now is to win time. As soon as Uncle Oscar makes all the arrangements we'll change our tune."

"Oscar, Oscar, Oscar! But what if Oscar leaves us in the lurch? Besides, what has gotten into Privalov? Who would think of it? Philanthropy!"

"He's playing into our hands. Leave the child its toy—as long as it's amused. Have you heard? Things are black with Vasily Bakharev."

"Yes, indeed. Absolutely surprising!" Lyakhovsky uttered.

"Not surprising at all. Quite the reverse! It's natural. There's still the question of where Bakharev ever got his capital."

"There you go too far," Lyakhovsky objected. "I know Bakharev—I can vouch for him."

"Not a very convincing argument," Polovodov contended. "What if I vouch for you today, and you sink me the day after? You would, wouldn't you, without batting an eyelid. Ha-ha-ha! I wouldn't even hold it against you. *Homo homini lupus est*. By the way, are you having your usual Christmas ball? Splendid."

"Yes, the ball," Lyakhovsky muttered, crestfallen. "Money, money, money. Who was the fool who thought up balls?"

## XVI

The auspicious day of the ball arrived at last. All Uzel, the Uzel *beau monde*, that is, was on its feet from early morning. The poor dressmakers did not sleep all night, putting finishing touches on various evening gowns. Khiona was tied up at the Veryovkins', where

the question of Alla's *toilette* was of paramount concern. No general could have displayed such cunning insight and resourcefulness as she, not even before the most decisive battle. Each little trifle was weighed at a preliminary debate, then in perspective, and only then, after appropriate fittings and experiments, came the final decision. This could only be reversed on a higher level, that is, when all these mere nothings were tried on Alla.

"Don't raise your shoulders, dear child," Khiona pleaded, "there's an ugly pit near the shoulder-blades when you do. Keep that in mind."

"Nonsense," Alla fumed. "You're putting me through the paces like a fire-horse."

"You'll thank me for it in time," Khiona chattered. "Can't tell when fortune smiles. You're no worse than the richer brides. Money, like water, comes and goes. A rich bride today may be poor tomorrow. I simply can't wait to see that stuck-up Nadine. I'm bursting with curiosity. Can you imagine, Privalov was in love with her? Yes. I simply can't understand men. But Privalov's evidently a clever man and must have thought better of it by now."

Privalov was also preparing for the ball with a pleasant sense of excitement. He was thinking of the moment he would see Nadine there. He closed his mind to the utter futility of it, surrendering to the wave of emotion that again controlled him. He had spent most of the time before Christmas in Garchiki, had called on the Bakharevs several times, but had had no luck. The first time Nadine stayed in her room, and the second time she had just gone somewhere shortly before he came. Ipat did not share in his master's high spirits and sighed sadly as he helped him into his evening clothes, dropping things all the time, picking them up and running into the furniture.

The night was clear and cold, the sky powdered with star dust. The snow sparkled blue underfoot. Privalov had not felt as contented and gay in a long time and inhaled the crisp winter air with particular pleasure.

There was a crush in the hallway, although he was early. Outside two mining engineers and a lawyer, whom Privalov had met at the Polovodovs', he knew no one. Ladies in their best finery ascended the stairs, pulling their long trains behind them. Privalov sensed that they felt as he did; it was reflected in their feverishly shining eyes and strained, nervous gestures. A young girl in a white dress drew his eye. This was doubtlessly her first ball, and the debutante was so charmingly confused and so utterly happy. Her limbs obviously refused to obey her through all the excitement, and were in the way, as it were, while she herself wished to take to the air and fly to the tune of the music reaching her ears from the main hall. Puppies experience that sensation when taken hunting for the first time, but this simile, when it occurred to Privalov, seemed much too coarse for the occasion.

"We've been looking for you," he heard Victor Bakharov and David Lyakhovsky shout to him.

"What's up?" Privalov asked, looking curiously at the curled hair of his two companions.

"D'you want a lady?" asked Victor.

"I don't dance."

"Are you serious? Come, come, there's a certain doctor's widow here you'll be happy to know. Where are you going? Wait. Ha-ha! That madman's here, you know."

"What madman?" Privalov stammered, his spirits dropping.

"Why, Loskutov! Ha-ha! There's someone for you! You're birds of a feather," Victor said.

Privalov had a difficult time shaking off the boisterous young men, and tramped off to the main hall, where a dense, noisy crowd was surging to and fro. The news

of Loskutov's presence came as an unpleasant surprise. Stopping in the doorway, Privalov scanned the hall with his eyes. It was so brightly lit that he had to squint his eyes; faces mixed in colourful confusion, moving and milling like a beehive. But most of all Privalov was struck by the appearance of the hall itself. It was unrecognizable. There was exotic greenery in the corners, restored paintings, new drapings on the windows and a brightly polished parquet underfoot. Alfons Bogdanich had done wonders. At that moment Privalov glimpsed the familiar figure of the philosopher crossing the hall with the look of one who had stumbled into a kingdom of shadows.

"She's with him," Privalov thought distractedly, trying to see the lady in the white satin dress who walked leaning on Loskutov's arm.

"There, look what a fine pair they make!" Victor shouted close to his ear, diving up at his side suddenly. "Did you see Zosya walking with Loskutov? Ha-ha!"

"Was it Zosya?"

"Why, of course! People do the strangest things," Victor replied. "I reckon she has something up her sleeve. Couldn't just be wasting her time with that madman."

"Ah, and there's Khiona!" he added, leaving Privalov's side.

Two little groups were making a stately ascent up the stairway: Alla in a cream-coloured evening gown tripping lightly along in front of the others, arms bare and bodice cut daringly low; Ivan Veryovkin puffing in her wake with the happy smile of a proud father; Agripina hanging on his arm and looking unusually impressive; and Khiona and her husband making up the rear.



Privalov bowed to the women and shook the thin hand of Ivan Veryovkin, who fixed his smiling eyes on him intently.

"What a crowd! What a crowd!" Khiona was exclaiming with the enthusiasm of a schoolgirl, squinting her eyes playfully. "At last you'll see all our beauties, Sergei Alexandrovich. Have you ever met Anna Poyarkova? Tall, black-eyed, truly delightful—perfectly delightful!"

In passing, Khiona managed to roll her eyes at Alla, as much as to say that here was a girl for someone who knew the worth of women. The little group soon mixed with the crowd, and Privalov crossed the hall, heading for a side chamber. He knew Pani Marina, Lyakhovsky's wife, always attended the Christmas ball and was eager to meet her. She happened to be walking in his direction with her husband. She looked striking in her cherry-coloured velvet dress, a red camellia in her hair, nodding haughtily in reply to Privalov's bow, smiling the stereotyped smile of the gracious hostess.

"You don't know each other," mumbled Lyakhovsky, who looked much like a wooden mannikin in his frock-coat. "Pani Marina, this is Sergei Alexandrovich Privalov. A fine young man whom you're sure to like. Can't help liking him!"

"Very glad to know you!" Pani Marina drawled, giving Privalov her hand with the grace of a stage queen.

Privalov was prevented from replying as someone's hand pulled at his shoulder. He turned round to discover the Polovodovs. Alexander Polovodov said, shaking his hand:

"At last you've come out into the world. Tony, can you imagine, Sergei Alexandrovich does not dance. Victor Bakharev just told me."

"Sergei Alexandrovich must have been joking," Antonida said softly. "Or maybe he's ashamed of dancing with provincials," she added archly, showing her small white teeth.

Antonida seemed stunningly beautiful to Privalov at that moment, beautiful from head to foot, from the folds of her dress to the hair on her head.

"Tony, you'll excuse me," Polovodov uttered hurriedly, gently releasing his grip on her arm. "I won't be a minute. I'll leave you with Sergei Alexandrovich."

Antonida said nothing to her husband, looking languidly at Privalov with her warm, moist eyes, which seemed to say: "Well, why don't you offer me your arm? Can't you see I'm alone?" Privalov did offer her his arm, and Antonida leaned on it lightly with hers, invested in a white kidskin glove which reached to the elbow.

"Let's go to the hall," Antonida suggested, gathering up her train on which some awkward guest had just stepped.

Polovodov returned and was obviously pleased to find that he was rid of his wife for the moment.

"Who would you think the reigning beauty here today?" he asked, turning to Privalov.

"Zosya and Nadine, of course," Antonida put in, feigning indifference.

"Wrong, Tony," Polovodov replied. "Have you seen Vera Bakhareva?"

"Why, no?" Antonida said.

"She's unquestionably the prettiest girl present here today," Polovodov exclaimed. "It's her first ball. Yes, yes. Everything is so naive, so charmingly coy and demure about her—she's a regular budding rose."

Antonida knew her husband's chicken-hearted ways too well, and shook her head dubiously. He was prais-

ing Vera's beauty to throw dust in their eyes. His passion for Zosya was no secret to anyone.

"Take a good look at her," Polovodov whispered into Privalov's ear. "Sloping shoulders, bosom, and the vertebrae rising in barely perceptible pink mounds down her spine. That's something you find only in brunettes."

"You never seem to want to call on us these days," Antonida scolded lovingly after Polovodov departed. "I mean, you come to see Alexander on business and leave at once, terrified by the prospect of running into me."

"I've been terribly busy," Privalov pleaded.

"I'll never believe it," Antonida retorted heatedly, leaning firmly on Privalov's arm. "If a man wants to, he always finds time. I have no claims on you, of course, because it's no fun being bored. I was bored to death myself all this time. Things looked so bleak for some reason. I'm so tired of everything."

Antonida giggled softly as she finished speaking. It was a somewhat morbid, strange kind of laugh, quite out of keeping with her healthy complexion. Privalov looked at her in surprise. She lowered her eyes gently and made a serious mien. They walked in silence across the ballroom, pushing through the crowd and greeting acquaintances. Privalov sensed that the men followed them with their eyes and made playful remarks at Antonida's expense.

"Let's sit here—in the corner," Antonida said wearily, lowering herself into a velvet settee.

The crowd surged back, making a circle in which dancing couples pirouetted gracefully. Victor Bakharov's goatee flashed by as the young man worked away vigorously with his legs; then David floated by with golden-haired Anna Poyarkova in his arms, and a young doctor with a ruddy face and flowing curly hair. There were several mining engineers and lawyers, a fop-

pish school-teacher, a captain of the gendarmes and several bank employees—the usual Uzel dancers. Privalov glimpsed Vera spinning, a pink whirl, in Polovodov's arms.

"Look, there's Zosya," Antonida whispered, pointing her fan at a passing couple.

Zosya was walking arm-in-arm with a tall, handsome Pole, whom, among others, Alfons Bogdanich had specially imported for the ball. The Pole was unusually handsome, with that particular purity of type and poise which Russians lack. To all appearances he felt at home, like a fish in water, walking with an easy, confident gait, smiling gently to his lady. Privalov saw him put his right arm round Zosya's waist—but in his own special way, unlike all the others, so that Zosya leaned slightly against his broad chest. The Pole cleared a path for himself with an easy movement, mixing with the dancing crowd.

"Allow me," Victor Bakharev invited Antonida, diving up out of the crowd. She rose and Victor put his arm round her waist. She looked back at Privalov over her shoulder and smiled her perplexing smile. A surge of dancers bore the couple away.

## XVII

The sense of pleasant excitement which Privalov had had at first soon gave place to vague discomfort. He was wearied by the stuffy air, the glitter of lights, the suffocating heat and the crush, although he was still reluctant to give up his cozy corner. Here the dancing throng concealed him from the greedy attention of entirely strange people. His reputation of millionaire was still high, and many had come to the ball specially to see him. Privalov was acutely aware of this general, annoying curiosity in the expressions of the faces turned

to him, and in the whispers he heard behind his back. He longed to see Nadine, rose from his settee, and wandered from chamber to chamber in search of her. Soon he glimpsed her familiar profile and proud, intelligent head, so well fitted to her shoulders.

Nadine was softly saying something to the doctor. A miniature diamond cross glittered on her open neck, and a camellia was pinned to her golden hair. Privalov watched her intently from afar and intercepted Khiona's glance just as she was whispering something into Agrippina's ear with a meaningful smile, nodding her head at him. He felt the blood rush to his face under the glance of the worthy matrons, and winced as if he had stepped on a snake, turning his back on them.

"Hold on, Sergei Alexandrovich!" Nicolas stopped him, dressed in a black evening suit and white gloves. "Where are you going?"

"Just roaming back and forth, I suppose."

"So am I," Nicolas boomed. "Let's creep off to the dining-room. They have a liqueur there—I forget what it's called. Some clerical recipe: *Lacrima Christi*, or the Tears of Maria Magdalene, or something. You do like liqueurs, don't you? I remember perfectly."

Nicolas linked his arm in Privalov's and dragged him off to the dining-room, where the more distinguished society set was gathered round little tables in the midst of plants and flowers—Alfons Bogdanich's bright idea of creating the atmosphere of a countryside tavern. There was the chairman of the circuit court, a tall old man with an angry countenance and bristling side whiskers; two members of the court—one haggard and long, and the other short and fat; Kobyako, the prosecutor, with a long Cossack moustache and bulging eyes; a small, perpetually drunk mining engineer; the bank director married to Agrippina's sister; several prosperous gold-miners; the smart-looking, aged chief of police with a mili-

tary bearing and a grey moustache; the town mayor who was a ruined Yaroslavl trader, and some others.

"Infernal crush," Veryovkin observed.

Privalov was bowing to acquaintances, scarcely able to keep track of all the questions showered upon him. "What's the idea of building the flour mill?" someone asked. "Absolutely pointless. And never look in at the club. Slighting us, eh?"

This general attention confused Privalov. He did not know most of these people, but was himself obviously known to all, and now they were ogling him with typical provincial curiosity. The majority looked at the heir of a fabulous fortune as they would at a rare bird. But the tenor was nonetheless of the very friendliest, accorded to all newcomers of some importance in Russia, and only the Privalov flour mill was clouding the horizon.

"Ah, hell! Give that flour mill up," the drunk engineer mumbled, snatching at Privalov's sleeve. "Give it up, I tell you. To hell with it. We better get you married. Gentlemen, let's get Sergei Alexandrovich married; that'll settle him."

"Quite right," someone responded. "Get him married. He'll come to the club then and play cards. Ha-ha! I'll vouch for it."

"There's Danila loading himself up," Veryovkin remarked, pointing his finger to a corner. "Hey, Danila, I say, got your eyes on the wine?"

"Right," Danila blared hoarsely. "Look what fine company we have: one better than the next."

A ring of curious lookers-on crowded round Danila. Lepyoshkin stood out with his massive frame among the several sedate-looking countenances of indefinite occupations. Judging by their costumes they were all prosperous men, well fed, with the hint of the merchant in them.

"All bigwigs here," Veryovkin whispered in Privalov's ear. "Regular money-bags. That one with the goatee has over a million. Yes. And how he made it, you may ask; through trifles. He had potluck—one thing led to another, and so on."

"Have a drink with me, Sergei Alexandrovich," Danila clamoured.

"No, thank you."

"Wet the red lane and be done with it," Lepyoshkin responded.

"Ah, so you're here!" Polovodov called out, elbowing his way through the crowd. "Fine, fine. My man, give us something. Ah, all birds of a feather." He seated himself between Privalov and Danila. "One happy family. That so, Danila?"

"No mistake. Fine company, I might say, fine company; won't find another like it, search high, search low," Danila vociferated.

"Now that Sergei Alexandrovich's here the turn-out is complete. Won't let him go now, come what may."

The dining-room was crowded with businessmen of the newest breed. The vague, indefinite outlines of a novel type, distinct from the old Russian merchant, were coming to the surface in them. They kept away from the other merchants, whom they treated somewhat disdainfully, but were, these half-muzhiks, still a long way from real, dyed-in-the-wool gentlemen. The cut of their clothes, their gestures and speech—all betrayed a peasant turn, which nothing could eradicate. There were prominent grain dealers among them, who annually handled millions of poods of wheat, and dealers in lard, hemp and flax; there were gold-miners, industrialists and financiers pure and simple, who were in the banking business. Privalov took stock of them, these people of a kind entirely new to him, who had sprung up and developed before our

eyes with all the demands, requirements and trends of a new life.

"All great cards," Veryovkin said of them. "Virile, tough, but a far cry from Lyakhovsky and Vasily Bakharov. They haven't a patch on them."

Privalov kept silent. He was thinking that he himself would soon have to grapple with this all-powerful crew. Here were his would-be adversaries, perhaps even enemies. The latter was, as a matter of fact, more likely to be the case. But for the time being the cards were closed and they could only guess each other's hand.

"Want me to introduce you to all of them?" Veryovkin sipped his liqueur. "They're all my clients."

"No, some other time."

Champagne was conjured up. Privalov was toasted, wine-glasses clinked, flattering wishes were expressed. He had to drink, thank them for their kindness, then drink again. After several glasses he rose from the table and made his escape as best he could, ignoring the protests of his newly-won friends.

"Well, go on, go on and rest your eye on our women," Polovodov released his victim. "It's the backwoods. You'll find field flowers, forget-me-nots. As for Vera, don't forget what I told you."

Privalov sighed with relief when he finally stepped out of the dining-room. Through the open door of the adjoining chamber he glimpsed green table-tops and card players. Among them was the senior Veryovkin, dealing. Sitting opposite him was the famous Lomtev, a strong, handsome-looking, grey-bearded old man, and another gentleman with a green face and tousled hair. Privalov divined by the pallor of Veryovkin's countenance and the large beads of perspiration on his bulging brow that the stakes were running high.

Privalov toured the rooms in search of Nadine, studiously avoiding his newly-acquired acquaintances. He



was in deep anguish. Why was he here? Why had he just made friends with these people and drunk champagne? "Ridiculous," he thought, lowering himself into a chair. His eyes looked indifferently at the crowd about him. His thoughts drifted into the far-away past when quite a different set of people made merry in these very same rooms—the Poluyanovs, Razmakhnins and Kolpakovs—who were now languishing in their frightful ruins. The same fate, quite likely, lay in store soon for this house as well.

"I've been looking for you, Sergei Alexandrovich," Nadine said cheerfully as she stopped before him. "You look bored." Pointing at Loskutov with her eyes, she added, "My partner, too, doesn't know what to do with himself." Indeed, Loskutov looked miserable.

Privalov offered Nadine a chair.

"You're probably surprised to see me at this ball?" the girl inquired when Loskutov drifted away.

"Not a bit. Why shouldn't you come if all the others do?"

"Yes, but in our present circumstances—you know what I mean. My mind isn't in it just now. What's more, Father didn't want me to go. But if Mother wants anything, she'll always have it her way, and she got it into her head to have Vera come out. So I'm the chaperone."

"I saw Vera dancing some time ago. She's making a hit."

Nadine smiled sadly and shrugged her shoulders. Privalov sensed that she wanted to explain something to him, but hesitated. Yet he was much too happy to be speaking to her, stupidly happy, and like all happy people he was thinking only of himself and had no eyes for anything else.

"Mazurka!" someone announced.

"Oh, I seem to have promised this dance," Nadine recalled, rising to meet her approaching partner.

Privalov's happiness waned as swiftly as it had come.

## XVIII

When the first breath-taking sounds of Khlopitsky's mazurka floated down from the gallery the crowd rushed to the ballroom, where pairs of dancers were lining up. Silver-haired, plump Pan Kukhtsinsky, the illustrious dancer, stood in the forefront with Pani Marina. Behind them was the young, strikingly handsome Pole, Pan Zhukotinsky, and Zosya; then came Pan Mozalevsky and Nadine, David and Vera, Victor Bakharev and Anna Poyarkova, the young doctor and Alla, Alfons Bogdanich and Agrippina Veryovkina, etc., etc. Twisting a grey moustache and clicking his heels, Pan Kukhtsinsky led the dance with the swagger only the Poles possess when dancing the mazurka. The onlookers were all egotists, wrapped in admiration as they watched the two leading couples. The intoxicating strains of the mazurka stirred the blood, and people abandoned the card tables and the dining-rooms to come and watch. A grey haired individual was beating time with his foot, while the inebriated engineer screamed effeminately, snapping his fingers and clacking his tongue:

"Dashing—dashing, by Christ! Tara ta tta, tara ta tta! Bravo, Kukhtsinsky! Dashing, Kukhtsinsky!"

The mazurka went on and on, for almost an hour. The pairs were played out, the ladies panting heavily as they executed their *pas* with weary faces. The Poles alone showed no signs of fatigue, dancing with ever mounting zest. Privalov was among the onlookers, watching the furious dance from the side-lines, and regretting that he was not in the middle of the floor, taking part.

"Ah, so that's where you are," Veryovkin mumbled thickly into Privalov's ear. He smelled strongly of vodka and looked about with dazed eyes. "Good . . ." he drawled,

and his mouth twisted into a drunken smile. Privalov had never seen him smile before, for, like all born comedians, Veryovkin was always imperturbably cool.

"Not bad at all," Privalov agreed.

"Not bad? Why, you—oh, but all this is nonsense," Veryovkin muttered good-naturedly, and, glancing askance at Privalov, added in an entirely different tone, "I'm under the weather tonight. Very much so. And, you know, I've lost... three thousand. Lomtev fleeced me. Yes. Only they were my very, very own. Not someone's. Listen to what I'll tell you, Sergei Alexandrovich. We, that is, you and I—we're the only honest people here. As for the others, the dancers and the watchers—d'you know the honest ones among them?"

"A very ticklish question, Nicolas."

"Not ticklish at all. Cast off your manners, sir. Look over there; see Dr. Sarayev? The one with the plump tall lady. He's honest—though he thinks I'm a scoundrel. But that doesn't matter. I respect the old man. Then there's Loskutov. He's honest, too, though he's not of this world, may the Lord forgive him. That makes two. The chairman of the court isn't a bad egg, I'd say, but he's stone-dead. They say he sweats clauses and paragraphs of the law. Upon my word! 'And there came unto Jesus one versed in law....' Well, he's the one—our chairman is. Yes!"

The mazurka came to an abrupt end when the young girl Privalov had seen earlier on the stairway fainted. She was taken away to the ladies' room. Agrippina swam by, red as a carrot, her hair all awry at the back of her head. Poor Anna Poyarkova's train was torn off, so that the ladies had to form a living screen round her and herd the blushing girl to the dressing-room.

Zosya walked alone; she was looking for someone in the crowd with feverishly burning eyes. At the door she found him.

"I'm exhausted," she whispered weakly, giving her hand to Loskutov. "Take me to my room. It's on the right, past the blue parlour. If you only knew how exhausted I am!"

"You shouldn't have danced so much," Loskutov observed gravely.

"If you had it your way, I'd sit and yawn," the girl snapped back capriciously, and added after a brief pause, "You probably think I'm having a wonderful time, don't you? Well, I'm not. Not a bit of it. I've been on the edge of tears. But I'm a fiend, you know, and it was my anger that made me want to dance till I dropped."

Along the way they encountered Dr. Sarayev.

"Doctor, remember our bet?" Zosya cried out in passing. "You've lost."

The doctor stopped and looked at Zosya's smiling face pensively.

"It's right here," Zosya pointed to a shut door.

They entered an empty room with old-fashioned furniture and faded red velvet upholstery. The single lamp with an opaque shade gave a dim light, leaving the corners in darkness. The door remained open. Loskutov seated his lady on a small round settee. Zosya sat with lowered eyelids, breathing heavily.

"Perhaps I ought to bring some water?" Loskutov asked.

Zosya raised her glorious eyes at him, obviously failing to grasp his question, then smiled gently and motioned Loskutov to sit by her side.

"Here," she whispered, lowering her eyes again.

Loskutov looked at Zosya inquiringly and sat down timidly.

"You think I'm a flighty kind of girl," Zosya said with a catch in her voice. "Don't deny it, because I can see. You think all I'm capable of is playing the fool, dressing and training horses, don't you?"

"I fail to understand why you broach the subject," Loskutov stated. "I don't think I ever gave you any cause."

"But I could have been an entirely different person," Zosya continued in a kind of trance, paying no heed to Loskutov's words. "Perhaps no one feels the emptiness of the life I lead more than I do. Even my recreation and fun are poisoned with it. Now, if—but maybe I'm boring you with my prattle?"

"No, on the contrary—by all means," Loskutov stammered.

"Confess. You never suspected that I could give anything a serious thought. Isn't that so? You only saw how I played the fool, and failed to spot the reasons for it. Well, I want you to know that I'm tired of it all, tired to death! Tired of all this glitter, this deceit, this emptiness. They oppress me."

"But you have all the means to fashion your life differently. You need only wish it."

"But if what I want, what I'm striving for, is out of my power?" Zosya cried out. "I'll be a laughing-stock if I say.... People will think I'm crazy. There's just one person in the world who's loyal to me, who loves me dearly, and whom I repay for it with a thousand petty injuries, slights and stupidities. That person's the doctor. The doctor will do anything for me if I say the word, but in *this* he's powerless. I tried conquering myself, played the fool, joked, laughed to hide my feelings, and I'm awfully glad everybody took it for the real thing."

"It's unfair if you include me in this 'everybody,'" Loskutov remarked. "I've thought several times...."

"You—you thought of me?" Zosya interrupted him with a catch in her voice, staring at Loskutov with wide-open eyes.

"Just as I do of all other people."

"And more precisely?"

"I thought you want to study seriously at times, that you want to do good to others, but then the impression faded. Perhaps I'm wrong, Zosya, but you yourself...."

"It isn't that. It's the environment—it oppresses me."

"And the vanity."

"And the vanity," Zosya agreed. "I don't deny it. But you know, whoever admits to his failings is half-way to correction. If there had only been a hand that would—Oh, yes, I'm very vain! I worship power. Power is always original and conspicuous. I wish I were the slave of just such a power, a power that is extraordinary and has no need of all this tinselled splendour." Zosya motioned to her dress and the appointments of the room. "A power like that could make life worth living. It could give happiness."

"But why be a slave?"

"Slave? But what if I like it? What if it's in my blood—this organic need of being a slave? Take what the ordinary multitude lives for; it's all so wretched, and cut to measure. But is it worth living if you live like all the others? That's just why I want to be a slave. What's more, I want to be despised—and loved just a little."

"I still don't understand."

Zosya bit her lips and tossed her head nervously, her golden hair falling in luxuriant waves over her bare shoulders. There was something breath-taking, something fascinating in her beauty, a power which attracted irresistibly. Indeed, one had to be a Loskutov to fail to notice its bewitching charm at that instant.

"Sometimes I wish I could die," Zosya said throatily. Pink spots appeared on her cheeks, and her eyes darkened. "The best years of my life go by with scarcely a single minute that I should care to recall. Everything's

aimless and empty, one day as drab as the other, with not a single bright moment."

Loskutov kept a sombre silence; Zosya's pink nostrils dilated, her bosom heaved.

"Listen," the girl said inaudibly, lowering her gaze. "Suppose there's a girl who loves you, while you think her a flighty, light-headed, useless thing. What would you do if she were to look you in the eyes and say, 'I know you think I'm worthless, but I worship you. I'd be happy in my self-debasement just to have the good fortune of breathing by your side?'"

"Zosya, if you're in earnest. . . ." Loskutov tried to rise from the settee, but Zosya held him back. "I think we just don't understand one another, and. . . ."

"No, you understand perfectly well what I want to say," the girl panted. "You want me to make the first confession. So be it: I love you!"

Zosya practically shouted this final phrase, and now waited for the fatal blow, hands clasped to her face.

"Zosya—I—I—well, first of all, take hold of yourself," Loskutov spoke quietly, trying gently to pull her hands away from her face. "Let's be serious. It is the need for love that speaks in you, and you're deceiving yourself. You have an absolutely false, idealized impression of the object of your passion, and, moreover. . . ."

"Kill! Kill me. But hurry, and don't strike me from behind the corner! I told you how I feel. Now you must say how you feel," the girl whispered.

"I cannot reciprocate, Zoya."

The girl moaned, then flung her head against the back of the settee, laughing hysterically.

"You cannot. Ha-ha-ha! There's the only man I respected. Why don't you say it to my face? I had the courage. I conquered my shame and was the first to say that I love you. You can't even repay that with manly frankness. You hide behind an empty phrase. At this instant

I'm a thousand times better than you are! Now I understand everything: *you love Nadine*. Don't you?"

"Yes," Loskutov uttered, a hint of confusion in his face.

"Well, go then. Ha-ha-ha! No, come back!"

Zosya clasped her snow-white, glorious arms madly round Loskutov's neck and showered his face with passionate kisses.

The ball was in its zenith when a vague rumour spread through the halls of some unfortunate occurrence. The ladies whispered to each other. Smiles turned to frowns. Who was it that spread the word? What had happened? Nobody could tell. Someone had seen the doctor, paler than a sheet, rushing off to the inner chambers. Like the others, Privalov was bewildered, and searched for acquaintances who could tell him what the matter was. As he was walking across one of the side-rooms Lyakhovsky caught up with him, his face drawn and eyes blank.

"For heaven's sake! Water! Water!" the old man moaned. He did not recognize Privalov. "She's dead, she's dead."

"Who's dead?" Privalov asked, but Lyakhovsky did not hear him and ran on, pulling at his hair.

The ball broke up, and the crowd surged in a gaudy, mournful throng to the exit. Privalov followed the others, his eyes looking for Nadine. On the stairway he encountered Antonida, who was walking alone, holding the train of her dress in her hand.

"Perhaps you could tell me what happened?" Privalov asked her.

"Nothing much—Zosya fainted," Polovodova replied unwillingly.

Privalov offered her his arm and helped her down the stairs; in the cloak-room he found her fur coat, helped her into it and looked in vain for Polovodov.



"You seem to be looking for someone, Sergei Alexandrovich?" Antonida asked.

"Yes, I don't seem to see your husband anywhere," he replied.

"And you won't, because he's upstairs, waiting for news about Zosya's faint. He let me go alone. Take me to my carriage, please. And see you put your coat on. You may catch cold."

When the brightly-lit carriage drew up before the porch, Antonida climbed in, and Privalov stretched his hand out to shake hers. But she only shrank back into the far corner of the carriage and pointed mutely to the seat next to hers. The doors slammed shut, and the carriage drove off briskly along Nagornaya Street, the snow crunching under its runners. Privalov felt a beautiful feminine face pressing closely to his, and warm, fragrant arms winding round his neck. This minute of intoxicating, sweet madness suffused Privalov's being with flaming fury. He lost his head.

"When we drive up, you leave the carriage at the door, and in half an hour I'll let you in," Antonida whispered. "Alexander won't come home until morning. They're going to carouse at the 'Magnet,' I hear. You must have been invited, too?"

"Yes."

"Did you promise to come?"

"Yes—just to get rid of them," Privalov confessed.

Antonida mused for a minute, then said with an indolent smile:

"If Alexander asks you why you didn't come to the 'Magnet,' confide in him under pledge of secrecy that you had a rendezvous with a certain married woman. He's stupid, and will never guess who you mean."



# **PART**

## FOUR



## I

**I**T WENT HARD with the Bakharevs.

All the money they had had went down the drain, while the mines demanded new investments. Danila Shelekhov was on a spree, and did not show up for weeks, spending most of his time with Victor. Vasily Bakharev's stocks fell rapidly among the Uzel financiers, and for the first time in his life the Uzel-Mokhov Bank went so far as to refuse to discount his promissory notes. It did not upset the old man. He knew who had done this unkindness to him. It was Polovodov—one of those who delivered stabs only in the back. The noose was being pulled tight. The situation grew more and more desperate every hour. Old bills and promissory notes, obligations Bakharev had long since forgotten, came to light. He had to part with his last to keep up appearances. Luckily work had stopped in the mines during the winter season, which gave Bakharev respite from paying current expenses. But the spring, when operations would resume, would be all the more disastrous. Where to get money and leave for the mines with the final snow, before the spring floods washed away the roads?

In mid-January Vasily Bakharev's condition improved visibly. He wandered about the rooms with the aid of a crutch.

"Take a trip," the doctor suggested. "You need exercise."

Bakharev's spirits rose. He was like a child allowed to come outdoors after a long spell of bad weather. As impatient as all sick people long confined within four walls, he took the opportunity to visit Lyakhovsky, whom he had not seen for many months.

"It will be rather awkward," Nadine tried to intervene. "Zosya isn't well, and Lyakhovsky is in his study day and night. I was there the other day, and..."

"No, I simply must see Lyakhovsky," her father insisted, and told Luka to fetch his overcoat.

The old servitor helped his master into his street clothes, mumbling a prayer and crossing himself on the sly. "Soon as the master regains his health things will pick up," the old man mused, throwing a last look at Bakharev.

"Well, Luka, have I lost weight?" Vasily Bakharev asked, leaning on his crutch.

"You're a bit leaner in the face, but good enough yet to better some younger chap, I'd say."

Vasily Bakharev was enjoying himself thoroughly. Everything he saw seemed to gladden his eye—the frosty winter day, and the pedestrians hastening by with red, frost-bitten noses, and the easy gait of his horse, and the snow dust which powdered him from head to foot whenever they struck a bump in the road. His cares and troubles were left behind in the old house, and now he only longed to fill his chest with the fresh air, and to fly like the wind in his sleigh with breath-taking speed. "Pity I didn't take Nadine along," the old man thought as his handsome, polished sleigh was speeding at a spanking pace past Zaplatina's little house. "Never shows her nose outside the house, poor thing. I'm sure she'd enjoy the ride. Why didn't I think of it?"

In the hallway, Bakharev was met by the same old Palka, who had an irrepressible weakness for "real gentlemen." Palka helped him up the stairs, and dashed off to announce him while he rested on the landing.

"What a pleasant surprise!" Lyakhovsky screeched as Bakharev entered his study. "A regular treat. But as for me, alas, I'm in a bad way." Lyakhovsky motioned mutely to the wheel-chair in which he was seated. "In a bad way. Don't take it amiss for heaven's sake! Zosya's illness was a horrible blow, I thought I'd leave this world, but the doctor kept me here for some time more."

"I've heard of Zosya's illness and was deeply upset by it," Bakharev said, shaking hands with Lyakhovsky.

"Yes, yes. Thank you. Nadine never forgets us. She's an angel! I envy you, the happiest of all fathers."

He took a deep breath, and added sadly:

"Such is life. We run around one day making the fur fly, and pass into oblivion the next. Man is frail. Man is dust—nothing more. Comes a breeze and he's gone, gone with all his cobweb of cares, troubles, designs, good deeds and trifles."

Lyakhovsky spoke with great eloquence about the triviality and frailty of human existence, touched lightly upon life beyond the grave, the inevitable retribution for all one's actions and thoughts, and then passed on with similar ease to the present, that is, to the lawsuit which Veryovkin was going to start against the trusteeship.

"I can't make out the young people these days," Lyakhovsky concluded, changing the subject as soon as he observed the bad impression his mention of the trusteeship made on Bakharev.

He was so carried away that he ordered breakfast in his study, something entirely contrary to his habits. His host's joviality touched Bakharev, who had regarded him as the most secretive, the falsest of all men. But this time he approved of the tactful way Lyakhovsky gave to understand in passing that he was informed of Bakharev's predicament.

"Things will pick up," Lyakhovsky had said. "Health comes first. Business affairs are like the weather—dry one day, and wet another."

"Precisely," Bakharev had replied. "My sore foot had me tied."

"Right. We're all quite sure things would have gone smoothly if you had only been at the mines last summer. It's a bit of an ordeal. But what would our life be if such ordeals didn't shake it up once in a while. We'd grow

rusty. Take me, for instance; you know how much I love Zosya. She's all I have. And then this terrible blow. I thought I'd lose my mind. Tell me, why was it I of all people who had to go through this terrible ordeal? But I submitted, I suffered it, and now I count the seconds when she'll be well again. All my trust is in the doctor."

"I heard she was better?"

"We know nothing—not a thing. She's going through a crisis; it's lose all, or win all."

Taking advantage of his host's geniality, Bakharev observed that he would like to speak about the business that had brought him. That single word, "business," transformed Lyakhovsky. It was as though he had been hit over the head. He crouched pitifully in his chair, winking his eyes stupidly, vacantly, a bird-like expression appearing in his face.

"I must say before you begin," he warned his visitor, "that if you count on my credit, I have nothing at the moment. I give you my word!"

"But what if I ask you to act as guarantor? Your guaranty would save me," Bakharev said.

"Fine. Suppose I act as guarantor. You get the money and bury it in your mines. I'd have to foot the bill if anything went wrong, wouldn't I?"

"Yes."

Spreading wide his bony arms and raising his eyebrows, Lyakhovsky said in a hollow whisper, like a tragedian:

"I can't do it. I haven't any liquid capital. Everything, to the last kopek, has been invested. A thousand pardons, may I perish on the spot, I can't do it."

The blow was too sudden. Bakharev felt the world turning giddily. He rubbed his bad leg in his confusion.

"Look here," he said quietly, the blood rushing to his head. "Do you remember how—I don't want to reproach you with it, but..."



"My dear Vasily Nazarovich, who do you think I am?" Lyakhovsky uttered pleadingly. "How could I forget? No, I remember all too well how I came to the Urals poorer than a church mouse and how you gave me a helping hand. I'll tell the whole world that I am obliged to you for everything I have. Well begun is half done."

"You attach too much significance to the favour I did you," Bakharev remonstrated.

"No, no, I don't. An egg is dearest at Easter, isn't it?"

"Why d'you refuse then, when I, an old and sick man, come to you for help? I trusted you when you had nothing save the shirt on your back, didn't I?"

"Precisely. You trusted me, and I shall always value your trust."

"It follows, therefore, that you don't trust me."

Lyakhovsky hesitated for a single moment, no more than that. Then he said drily:

"No, I can't act as your guarantor."

Bakharev walked out of Lyakhovsky's study with a burning face and flashing eyes. He had suffered an insult he did not deserve and yet had to swallow. He emerged from the Privalov mansion in a daze, climbed into the sleigh and drove home. Everything flashed by as in a fog, just one thought pounding relentlessly at his brain: "Sergei, Sergei, I should never have gone to that Judas if it hadn't been for you!"

## II

An oppressive half-light reigned in Zosya's sumptuous bedroom; the windows were draped with heavy green curtains. All superfluous things had been moved out of the room. A smell of medicines hung in the air despite all precautions. Nurses kept watch round the clock in the adjoining room. The patient was installed in a large blackwood bed with silver incrustations, under a striped

bedspread made of Oriental silk. Zosya's pale chiselled face was barely visible upon the cambric pillow. Her eyes were ringed with dark circles and seemed even larger than usual. Her nose looked thin, and her recently crimson lips were white and drawn. Her luxuriant golden hair had been cropped and the girl resembled a boy of about fifteen with chiselled profile and thin, pencilled eyebrows.

"D'you think I'm getting better?" the girl asked the doctor indistinctly, weakly pulling her thin, white arm from under the blanket.

"You would be if you only had a bit more patience," the doctor replied drily, taking her pulse.

"I really don't care whether I live or die. There's nothing to live for."

"We'll talk about that when you get well," the doctor remarked flatly.

It was the third week running that the doctor had spent at her bedside, following the phases of her ailment. He himself resembled a sick man, face haggard, eyes sunk deep in their sockets, and skin darker than usual. In the first fortnight he had not slept more than three nights all told.

The doctor learned the story behind Zosya's ailment the day after the ball, but did not say a word about it to Lyakhovsky. Instead of wire, it had developed, Zosya had the most ordinary of female nerves. Her transition from girl to womanhood had occurred at a moment when the doctor and Lyakhovsky had least expected it. The first feminine emotions came to the fore in spite of the girl's ungovernable whims and trumpery, though they sooner resembled a caprice than genuine love. The doctor was tormented by the thought that Zosya's ailment, far from having been caused by the broken heart of a loving female, was the mere upshot of mortally wounded pride. It had been too much for her vanity to see Losku-

lov's indifference to her, when one and all worshipped the ground she trod on. As if this were not enough, he, Loskutov, had chosen another. The doctor was sure that Zosya did not love Loskutov at all, and could never have loved the man, but had made herself think she loved him, and had worked herself up little by little until she made that fateful declaration of love. Even when delirious the girl never mentioned Loskutov's name without coupling it with Nadine's. Pride and jealousy were at the root of her sickness.

The diagnosis was faultless, and it only remained to ease the natural course of the ailment, and to obviate causes that could aggravate it. The girl's constitution was staunchly fighting an unequal battle against the illness, but there had been moments when the doctor doubted a happy outcome. He had even consulted other medical men on two occasions, but the learned conclave could say nothing new. Two nights, when the flame of life seemed to be dying, were particularly bad. Zosya tossed about deliriously and did not recognize the people round her; the doctor sat at the head of the bed and counted the seconds like a captain who steers his vessel through raging seas. He would gladly have given half his life to relieve the sufferings of the girl, but medicine was powerless, there was nothing to do but wait.

At night, when the house slept soundly, Zosya's condition went from bad to worse. She turned and tossed in her bed.

"Doctor, give me your hand," the girl whispered, "I'll feel better."

She grasped his hand convulsively with her burning little fingers, and leaned back against the pillows. She had the sensation of slowly sinking into an abyss, and hung on to the doctor's hand as a sinking man hangs on to a straw.

"I shan't die, shall I, doctor?" she breathed with eyes closed. "Ah, but all doctors say that. I've been a selfish creature until now. Don't let me die, and I'll turn over a new leaf. Oh, doctor, I want to live! I took life lightly before, but it's short, like that of a May fly."

This was the crisis the doctor had been waiting for with a sinking heart for three long weeks. Early in the morning, when Zosya fell sound asleep for the first time, he staggered into Lyakhovsky's study.

"Dying?" Lyakhovsky asked, clasp ing his head; the doctor's grey face and his blank gaze had frightened him out of his wits.

"No, she's safe."

Lyakhovsky pressed the doctor's hand to his face, sobbing like a child, kissing it in a fit of gratitude. Tears poured uncontrolled down his cheeks, but they were tears of joy.

### III

Privalov was in the honeymoon of his stolen bliss. To be precise, he drifted with the tide that bore him along imperiously, stormily. When he emerged from Polovodov's house on the memorable night of the ball, his face tingling from Antonida's maddening caresses, his conscience was stirring in him, and an inner voice admonished: "You don't love her—her, the woman who has just given her love to you."

"No, I do, I do!" Privalov had sought to assure himself. "I do."

Next day Privalov was nearing her house again when he recalled that Antonida had told him to come to her mother's. His arrival there surprised and gladdened Agrippina Veryovkina.

Privalov thought she guessed the true cause of his visit, and kept apologizing for not having called on her earlier, as he had promised.

The hour which Privalov spent eye-to-eye with Agrippina seemed hopelessly long to him, and he was on the point of departing when a hasty ring sounded in the hallway. Privalov started and betrayed a slight confusion; something inside him seemed to snap. It was she, no doubt, it was her footsteps. Antonida made a display of her surprise at seeing Privalov in *maman's* boudoir, offered him her hand languidly and slumped wearily into the corner settee.

"You seem to have had a good time last night?" Agrippina asked her daughter.

"No, *maman*. I should have died of boredom if Sergei Alexandrovich had not come to my rescue," Antonida replied unwillingly, throwing a sidelong glance at Privalov. "And you, Sergei Alexandrovich, made a wantonly fine night of it—after the ball." She smiled slyly. "Alexander was telling me. . . ."

"I'm surprised that Alexander sees fit to tell you about it," Agrippina observed rigidly.

"Why, *maman*? Sergei Alexandrovich is a free man, The ball broke off before its time, so they rounded off the night."

Never before had Antonida Polovodova appeared so attractive to Privalov, and when Agrippina left them alone in the room at long last he approached her timidly to kiss her outstretched hand.

"I say," Antonida whispered to him when he pressed his lips to her neck, "the old lady guessed the truth at once. You behave like an oaf! Good thing we have nothing to fear from her. How stupid you look today!"

This somewhat stern tone gave place to a passionate kiss and Antonida scarcely had time to assume her usual

bored, languid expression when the approaching footsteps of her *maman* reached their ears. Rings swam before Privalov's eyes, he was on the crest of a tidal wave of happiness, ready to embrace and kiss even Agrippina. The remainder of the visit passed in high spirits. Privalov chattered and laughed light-heartedly, succumbing to the charm of Antonida's beautiful eyes.

At first they met during the hours when Polovodov was engaged at the bank. Privalov used to arrive just when the host had to leave the house, and each time the latter begged him to stay and wait for his return. Those were happy minutes. After seeing her husband out, Antonida forgot all her indolence and cut capers like a regular schoolgirl.

With each passing day Privalov attached himself more and more to his mistress, who drew him into her embraces with all the tantalizing lures of love. Each time she appeared before him an entirely new woman, never repeating herself in either her caresses, or fits of passion, or whims. He could never guess by the expression in her face what she was thinking. She uttered a thousand delightful trifles that women say only when they feel they are loved; her very whims, even her outbursts of anger, were strewn, as with flowers with sudden, unexpected eruptions of flaming lust. Privalov imbibed of this sweet love potion day after day, lulled by her cat-tish caresses, surrendering his gentle, submissive soul. The former Antonida seemed no longer to exist, and there was this other woman, who, it appeared, knew no bounds to her desires, and recklessly scorched two lives in the intoxicating fire of her fantasy.

"I want nothing from you, nothing at all!" she kept telling Privalov. "Love me as long as you like, and when you've had enough, don't expect me to cry over it. True, at times I want to strangle you, so you will never fall to another woman. At other times I want you to deceive

me, even to beat me. Your caresses and kisses are not enough—not enough. A Russian woman wants to be beaten, don't you know that, or she'll never be perfectly happy!"

But their much too frequent meetings at the Polovodovs' finally became awkward. Antonida decided to appear more often at the club, which Privalov had joined several months before, though he had never showed himself there.

#### IV

The club was in a two-storey stone house in Nagornaya Street, two blocks away from the old Privalov mansion. In the vestibule, whose walls were hung with hats and coats, one was enveloped by the typical grill-room atmosphere of tepid kitchen aromas and tobacco smoke. The bottom floor comprised several smaller chambers cluttered with green-topped card-tables. Here flourished the notorious Siberian variety of whist, whose chief heroes were Ivan Veryovkin, Lomtev and company. Nearby were two more chambers—one a billiard-room and the other a reading-room—instituted probably for no better reason than to appease someone's conscience, being scarcely ever used and serving only as a venue for certain mysterious tête-à-têtes at which promissory notes changed hands and kind-hearted men were touched for money to win back losses at cards; here too, in the wicker bentwood settees ship-wrecked gamblers recovered their composure and the worshippers of Bacchus their senses.

A fairly narrow stairway led from the vestibule to the first floor; the hand-rail was draped in dusty oleanders and some other greenery, which clung with its nettles to the ladies' dresses. During his first visit to the club

Privalov wandered from room to room on the ground floor, where he met nobody but strangers at the gaming-tables. He listened attentively to the noise of arriving carriages and to the subdued voices in the vestibule; he heard feminine talk, the rustle of dresses and feet, light footfalls on the stairs. The odour of the diverse perfumes available in castaway, provincial shops wafted from the vestibule, and among them that of the camphor used to preserve fur coats from the destructive onslaughts of moths.

At long last Privalov decided to ascend to the first floor, the domain of the ladies. On the stairs he met Khiona, who greeted him cordially:

"Ah, it's you, Sergei Alexandrovich! I never thought you'd come today!"

"I've been here for some time."

"It's such mixed company," Khiona explained on the way to the ballroom, where a wretched little orchestra was playing an outmoded polka. "Very democratic, I might say—shop assistants, petty clerks, shopkeepers and teachers. Also men of the *beau monde*—mining engineers, lawyers, the procurator, gold-miners, manufacturers and doctors. But you should see the assortment of pretty women!"

The shabby ballroom, remodelled from a one-time hot-house, was dimly lit by a dozen lamps; ugly garlands of conifer twigs spattered with paper flowers hung on the walls, suggestive of a funeral parlour. Along the walls, seated on time-worn settees, was a gaudy array of ladies, and in the far end, upon a small dais which served as a stage, was the orchestra. The men clustered near the doors. Several dozen couples whirled in the middle of the floor, raising a cloud of biting dust.

There were yet another six fairly large chambers, relatively better appointed than the ballroom and the rooms



on the ground floor. Their bizarre furniture, their nut-wood pier-glasses and the faded tapestry on windows and doors, belonged in a second-rate Petersburg tavern. One room was painted red, the other blue, the third green, etc. Men and women lounged on sofas, following Privalov with curious eyes.

"That lady with the rose in her hair," Khiona Zaplatina explained, "changes her lovers each season, and the one in the grey dress.... How d'you do, Pelageya—oh, have a look at that young girl—a bride, wealthy and beautiful; her father is a mere butcher. She has perfect poise. You'd never say she's of mean peasant stock, though her father was an ordinary muzhik!"

Privalov shook off the intrusive Khiona at long last and hung back in the dining-room, whose door opened on to the landing. This gave him an opportunity to see all the people entering the ballroom. But he had to be polite to Khiona, for she could be useful at some future time.

"Ah, dear Sergei Alexandrovich!"

Someone put his arms round his neck and showered him with kisses. It was Victor Bakharev, smelling sickeningly of vodka.

"Oh, Victor!" Privalov was glad to see him. "Haven't seen you for so long. What d'you do with yourself?"

Victor only waved his hand with a drunken smile.

"The old man's gone off his rocker," he began. "Mother's asking about you. You shouldn't neglect us! I say that to your face, though you may be a millionaire. Nadine is unwell, and Vera is gone on religion. As for me, I'm scarcely ever home, because Danila and I are on a spree. But my heart bleeds for the old man, and for my sisters, because you can't hide a pig in a poke, and it's all over town—whisper-whisper-whisper: 'Bakharev's ruined, Bakharev's bankrupt!'"

"Nonsense, Victor! Your father will come up again."

"Of course he will, damn them!" Victor slammed his fist down on the table, shouting, "He's nothing like the scum here. Ha-ha-ha! The idiots! Vasily Bakharev has only to raise his finger and gold will ooze out of all pits and holes. Just wait till spring. Father and I will go to the mines and put things right at once. Understand?"

"Victor," David Lyakhovsky called to him, "let's go! Katya's here!"

"Hang on, I want to speak to Privalov," Bakharev replied. "D'you know Katya Kolpakova? No? Well, brother, that's no way to catch flies here in Uzel! You should see her cancan! Ivan Veryovkin taught her!"

"Is it the same Katya Kolpakova?" Privalov looked up in surprise.

"Who else? Ha-ha-ha! There's only one Kolpakova. The old lady prays all day, and Katya—there she is in person, the redhead."

Victor pointed to a blue-eyed girl of medium height with a glorious head of golden hair which framed her coy, freckled ivory face like a silken halo. She was with an engineer, rocking slightly on her high heels as she walked.

"Zosya's improved, I hear?" Privalov addressed David.

"I think so," the young man replied indifferently, saddling his long nose with a golden pince-nez. "She's down with a strange kind of sickness. Come, Victor, let's go, or that damned Glazkov will carry Katya off."

"No fear of that. She has an appointment with Lepyoshkin tonight," Victor reassured him, heading for the door; but half-way he returned to Privalov, shook his finger at him for some minutes, grinning stupidly and nodding his head, and finally declared, "You're—you're all right, Privalov! Khe-khe! No mistake! That Tony, damn

her, is a goddess! What a bosom! But you know better...."

His outspoken insinuation shocked Privalov at first but he composed himself because whatever Victor said when he was drunk he would forget the next day.

While waiting for Antonida, Privalov observed the people round him. In the dining-room and the rooms below were the bread-winners, the businessmen, the bigwigs; upstairs, darting from room to room, was the front-line army of marriageable girls, chaperoned by their loving mothers, aunts and ladies of similar station. Khiona swam about in this mobile, smiling mob like a fish in water. She knew everybody, knew how to please everybody, to smile and say a gracious word. Mothers with overdue brides on their hands looked up to Khiona with mingling fear and hope. She had made her reputation. Merchandise that had long lost all hope of finding a customer, passed in her artful hands for the genuine article. Nearly a dozen young ladies owed their matrimonial well-being to her and her alone.

Then Privalov glimpsed the Polovodovs ascending the stairs. He saw them stop in the door to the ballroom, where a veritable throng of men and women surrounded them; Antonida dispensed smiles right and left, searching with her eyes for him. When the orchestra struck up a waltz, Polovodov made a few turns with his wife, then surrendered her to someone, and headed, wiping the perspiration off his face with a handkerchief, for the dining-room. Glimpsing Privalov, he stopped, spread his legs wide and raised his shoulders in a shrug of surprise.

"You too!" he exclaimed. "Tony told me about you, but I wouldn't believe her. But why sit here, Sergei Alexandrovich? Let's go down; you'll meet many people you know."

"I'll come down a bit later," Privalov replied. "Just now I want to pay my respects to your wife."

"See you don't make a fool of me." Polovodov shook his finger. "We could rake up an excellent foursome at whist. By the way, have you seen Katya Kolpakova?"

"Yes, Victor showed her to me."

"A regular lioness, eh? Did you notice the shape of her face?" Polovodov kissed the tips of his bunched fingers in token of his appreciation, and added apologetically:

"I'm really a member of the Nobles Society. Joined the club by force of circumstances. Businessmen come here, so I have to as well."

"Ah, you at last!" Antonida sang out when Privalov approached her. "Take me somewhere where it isn't hot and stuffy."

She looked up at Privalov with childish submissiveness, and asked quietly, while giving him her arm:

"You aren't annoyed, are you?"

"What have you done?" Privalov started.

She looked round and grimaced slightly.

"This is nothing more than a public house," she said, raising the train of her dress fastidiously.

She led him to the green corner room, where the lights were dim and there were less people. But no sooner had they exchanged a few sentences than a servant appeared in coat-tails, addressing himself to Privalov:

"You are wanted downstairs, master," he bowed respectfully, fingering his napkin.

"Who wants me?"

"Downstairs, master—your man," the servant explained.

Privalov left Antonida and went downstairs, where he saw Ipat with a letter in his hands.

"Courier brought it," Ipat said, shuffling his feet. "I was brushing the boots when someone hammered on the window."

Privalov ran his eyes hurriedly over the letter, which was from the Shatrov Mills, from Konstantin. He had

had word from Petersburg that the trusteeship case would drag out indefinitely if Privalov did not come to deal personally with the Senate. Konstantin begged Privalov to give up all his other affairs and hasten to Petersburg. Beads of cold sweat bathed Privalov's brow. The news was so untimely.

"What was it?" Antonida looked at him questioningly when he returned to her side.

He handed the letter to her.

"Are you going to leave me?" she asked thickly, lowering her eyes and pinching a fold in her dress with her fingers.

"Tony, dear, I simply must. Don't you see, the future of the mills depends on my trip."

She kept silent and did not raise her head.

"The trip will take a month at the most," Privalov continued, feeling the ground slipping from under his feet.

"That's untrue. You won't ever come back!" Polovodova mumbled. "I knew it all the time. Well, you know I'm not going to hold you. Do as you think best, and please don't worry about me. After all, what am I to you?"

A bitter smile played on her lips. She raised her eyes.

"Dear, dear Tony, what should I do?" Privalov pleaded. "Tell me, what should I do?"

"I don't dare advise you, Sergei, but if I were you, I'd send my solicitor to Petersburg and stay here myself to watch both the mills and the trustees."

Privalov grew pensive. Her advice had a great many attractions, of which the chief one Antonida had graciously left unsaid—it was herself. Her magnanimity and submission triumphed.

## V

Nicolas Veryovkin gladly agreed to go to Petersburg for two reasons. He had long been yearning for the low resorts in the capital, and, secondly, felt in need of a change after his lengthy sojourn in the backwoods.

"Remember, I mentioned a mysterious thread?" he reminded Privalov. "Well, here's where it comes to the surface."

"What, precisely, do you mean?" Privalov asked.

"Don't you remember my Uncle Oscar, who came here to fish? Well, the fish is biting."

"I don't see the connection."

"Neither do I, as yet. But in our profession we develop a kind of sixth sense. Tell me, why the devil did that uncle of mine suddenly have to come here? Furthermore, what took him to Lyakhovsky, and why did he go to see him together with Polovodov? That, dear boy, is a trio that could put the devil in their vest-pocket."

"You know what I think? You're looking for the proverbial piano strings in the soup, as the French say."

"Oh well, it's a bad dream, as we say," Veryovkin replied, "but God is merciful. We'll have our finger on Uncle. See that you keep after Lyakhovsky; don't give him time to catch his breath, nor Polovodov either. Don't mince matters with those two."

Three days later Nicolas Veryovkin, wrapped in a deer-skin coat which reached to his heels, was riding post-haste to Petersburg, while Privalov stayed in Uzel.

He divided his time between the four points where he could be together with Antonida—Khiona's parlour, the Veryovkins', the club and her own house. Khiona's parlour and the club were merely a sad necessity, because the lovers had no other choice; Polovodov's home offered far greater comforts, but there danger lurked behind every

corner. It was best at the Veryovkins', where they had all the conveniences they could wish for. Ivan Veryovkin was in the midst of a lucky streak and was scarcely ever at home; Nicolas had gone; Alla was a well-bred young lady and regarded Privalov with perfectly innocent eyes as a friend of the house and nothing more. As for Agrippina, she was a strange woman, and Privalov could not make her out. He did not know whether she suspected his true relations with her daughter, and if so, what her attitude was on that score. Agrippina seemed to be just the same Agrippina he had met the first time. On the one hand, he felt hot under the collar at the thought that one fine day his affair with Antonida might come to light, and conscious of a sense of guilt for putting Agrippina in this ticklish situation. On the other, however, he faintly suspected that it was due to Agrippina's world-wise tactics that things had somehow arranged themselves, and his official calls imperceptibly assumed the appearance of visits by a friend of the family, of whom no one would ever think badly.

Strangely, Privalov's frequent visits to the Veryovkins infuriated Khiona Zaplatina. She fancied that Agrippina was deliberately winning over her lodger, whereas he, by all divine and human laws, was her undivided and sole possession. The apple of discord threatened to wreck their childhood friendship, but with the foresight of a woman in love Antonida sought to nip the quarrel in the bud. She brought Khiona to her home several times and lavished such kindness, such attention, such love upon her that the latter yielded to her charms in spite of her forty-year experience. When Antonida hinted that she fully relied upon her discretion, which would not go unrewarded, Khiona even shed a tear out of the fullness of her heart.

"You know, I've always had a spot of pity for you," she confided devoutly. "Alexander is your husband, of

course, but I'll always say he's a snob. I can imagine how much you have to bear from him."

"You're mistaken, Khiona," Antonida tried to argue. "He has many failings, but arrogance isn't one of them."

"Oh, don't argue, for heaven's sake! He's arrogant, he's a snob!" Khiona screamed. "Like the Bakharevs and Lyakhovskys. Did you hear? Old Bakharev asked Lyakhovsky for a loan and was refused. Yes! Refused. What d'you think of that?"

God only knows by what mysterious channels Khiona learned of this. Neither Lyakhovsky nor Bakharev ever breathed a word about it to anyone.

"I'll be frank with you," the wrought-up Khiona continued, looking Antonida in the eye. "I've known you since you were a little child, *mon ange*, and have the right to be frank, eh?"

"By all means."

"You never loved your husband."

"Well, we never really made believe to be a loving pair."

"That's so, but the heart, particularly a woman's heart—ah, how much it suffers in solitude. No one will ever know. And yet, remember how Lermontov put it? 'While the years fleet by—the best years of all!'"

Khiona longed to be Antonida's confidante in affairs of the heart, but was courteously turned down. She was tempted to reveal her knowledge of Antonida's relationship with Privalov. The hint had been on the tip of her tongue, but she had controlled herself in the nick of time and was highly pleased with herself, because, as the saying goes, speech is silver, and silence gold.

"It'll come in handy some day," Khiona consoled herself while driving home in high feather from Antonida's.



## VI

After Christmas, Nadine stayed in her room, leaving it only at dinner-time, or to visit her father's study. Her room, its two windows opening into the garden, was furnished as modestly as a nun's cell. A settee upholstered with flowery chintz stood against the wall, and there were four chairs, an iron bed in the corner, a dresser, a book-shelf, a writing-desk and a sewing machine on a small work table. That was all. Nadine was fond of the room, because she could be alone there as much as she wanted. To win this luxury she had had to wage one of those petty little family wars. Marya Bakhareva had put her foot down. A girl, as she put it, had no business with a room of her own. "You can read your books in any one of the other rooms," the old sectarian had grumbled. All the wealthy sectarian homes were arranged in the same way: the best rooms remained unoccupied and were used only on holidays and special occasions, while the entire family was crowded into two or three rooms. The mistress could yet be found to have a bedroom of her own, but the children, God forbid, were not entitled to anything of the kind.

Marya Bakhareva regarded Nadine's room as an intolerable innovation. It was a regular eyesore to her, and she never set foot in it, just as she never visited her husband's half of the house. Vera, by the way, had no room of her own, and had no need of one, having the run of the whole house.

In the past three weeks Nadine had been going through mental torture, and was indescribably grateful to have a place where she could be alone. She had changed much, and had grown haggard; her eyes had an alarmed look in them, and her movements were languid and weary. The girl did not even study as she was wont, and an open book lay unread on the desk, and her embroidery

abandoned. Only the sewing machine thrummed long past midnight and Marya Stepanovna, who heard it, wondered all the time: "What has got into the girl with all that sewing?"

She would have been shocked if she had known. She would have lost her sleep. Baby's slips, diapers and all the other simple little belongings of an infant were being cut and sewn hastily in the cloistered seclusion of Nadine's room; the girl's shaking hand made crooked seams, and bitter girlish tears dropped frequently upon all this industry. What fear of the unknown future, what profound grief she suffered over it! And as time went on her determination grew to go and tell her father the bitter truth, before her critical situation would be discovered.

"What am I afraid of?" Nadine kept asking herself over and over. "I'm of age and my own mistress."

At times the treacherous thought of fleeing her father's house in the dead of night occurred to her, but her plain, honest soul revolted against it. Why the deception, if sooner or later the whole thing would come to light anyhow? Far better to face the music and leave the parental home with a clear conscience. On more than one occasion Nadine had walked out of her room with the intention of confessing to her father, but each time her hands dropped listlessly to her sides, her knees buckled and she returned to her secluded chamber, there to suffer her secret torments. She spent night after night without sleep, crying her heart out.

At long last the girl made her final decision. She put on a plain brown dress and went to her father's study. Along the way she encountered Vera, whom she kissed silently. As she took hold of the door-knob to her father's room, her heart missed a beat.

"Is that you, Nadine?" Vasily Bakharev asked without raising his head from his work.

"Yes, Father."

"What's the matter? You look run down. Are you ill?" her father asked, kissing her tenderly. "Well, sit down."

"No, I'm well—I'm better," she replied falteringly.

A brief pause followed. The old man shifted heavily in his chair: a foreboding of ill coursed through him.

"Has anything happened, Nadine?" He looked anxiously into his daughter's eyes.

"Nothing, Father, except that I've come to you," the girl replied. She looked round the room, as though taking advance leave of these dear walls. Then her eyes fixed upon her father's face, and her penetrating glance, filled with a strange determination, confused him; he rubbed his sore knee indecisively.

"Father," Nadine began, sitting down, "I've been thinking. Why is nature so utterly unjust to people? Why does it give physical strength to some, and weakness to others? Why does the woman have to bear the brunt? Why doesn't she, kept away from all social endeavour as she is, have her own little corner in her own home? Instead, she can always be turned out by her father, her brothers, her husband, even her sons. Why is she like a slave in the family, and yet not allowed to live any other way? What is a lark to men, wrecks the life of a woman once and for all. Look at the world of difference between brothers and sisters in one and the same family. Is that fair, Father?"

"I can't quite make you out today," the old man mumbled. "What are you leading up to?"

"Just this, Father," Nadine took a deep breath and looked in an agonized, frightened way at him, "suppose there's a son and a daughter in a wealthy family. Both are of age. The son meets a girl whom he likes, but his parents don't approve; the daughter meets a man she likes, but her parents detest him. The son has a child. How will the parents react?"

"They aren't going to pat him on the head for it, for one thing. He shouldn't have deceived the poor girl."

"No, let me go on. Suppose the same thing happens to the daughter. What happens then? The parents will forgive their son, even if he does not marry the mother of his child and just flings a pittance at her feet. But it's quite a different story if the same thing were to happen to the daughter. Everything comes down upon her—the fury of her family and the contempt of society. What had been no more than a temporary predicament to the son, is the cause of eternal shame to the daughter. Is that fair, Father?"

"Hard to say," Vasily Bakharev uttered thickly in a changed voice. "The son brings nothing with him to his parents' home, whereas the daughter...."

"But that's even worse, Father. The son abandons his child in a strange family and leaves both the baby and its mother to bear the responsibility. Not so with the daughter, who redeems part of her blame at least with her shame. Besides, she suffers purely physical torture, and then all the cares and the labours until the child grows up! Why will parents drive their daughter out of the house, and forgive their son?"

"Girls know what to expect and must therefore take good care of themselves," the old man put in.

"No, no, Father, it's an injustice, a horrid injustice!"

"Why are you saying all this?" the old man groaned, and seeing the deadly pallor of his daughter's face he sensed rather than deduced the terrible truth.

"The daughter I spoke of—it is I," Nadine declared.

"You—you—you?" the old man stammered insensibly; large, bright circles swam before his eyes, and he moaned loudly.

"I did not dare tell you earlier. I did not want to hurt you."

"And yourself? Yourself? Good Heavens! You've hurt yourself!" the old man shouted at the top of his voice, sobbing and clasping his grey head with his hands.

"I don't regret what I've done, Father."

Bakharev looked at his daughter with blood-shot eyes, jumped from his armchair and whispered hoarsely:

"I have no daughter any longer. Only disgrace. Heavens! Didn't I have troubles enough? No daughter, understand? No daughter, no, no, no!"

"I knew it. I'm going away," Nadine said quietly.

"No, you're not going away. Lord! Nadine! Who deceived you? Who?"

"No one deceived me," the girl whispered, shutting her face with her hands; tears ran down her milk-white fingers.

"The scoundrel! Decent men never do it," the old man said. "He's a scoundrel, whoever he is, making light of my grey hair."

"Father, you mustn't fly into a rage; it'll change nothing. If you want to say anything to me before I leave, let's talk calmly."

"Before you leave? Calmly? By God, you'll not go anywhere. I'll lock you up, you'll never see the light of day. Before you leave? Perhaps you want me to curse you before you leave, eh? And I shall. I shall. Be damned! Be damned both of you!"

Nadine sensed her father's face over her own, distorted with rage; she saw his clenched fists, his trembling body, and waited submissively for him to grasp her and throw her out of the house.

"Father, I've never asked you for anything," she began and sweet love rang in her trembling voice. "We're parting—for ever perhaps, and I beg you, compose yourself."

This pleading tender voice brought the old man back to his senses. He loved his daughter's voice. Its sound

took him back to the happy past. He remembered how he had wept bitterly at Nadine's bedside, when she, still a little girl, was at death's door. Why hadn't she died then, in the aureole of childish innocence? Later, when she was twelve, she fell out of the carriage right under the horse's hoofs. He was terrified when he saw her pale little face, drawn with fear, and her little fingers clawing the earth. The wheel would have crushed her little body, but despair had given him strength and he had upset the heavy carriage with a single jerk. The child was saved. Why hadn't the wheel crushed her then, to preserve the honour of his house and avert the shame and scorn that would now be her lot?

Bakharev sank back into his armchair, and his grey head dropped feebly upon his chest; the fit of fury had drained all his strength, and tears of despair now trickled down his cheeks.

"Father, dearest, forgive me!" Nadine cried out, falling to her knees before him. She had not been frightened by his anger, but his tears robbed her of her self-control, and with childish submissiveness she pressed her golden head to his hand. "Father, Father! This may be the last time I see you! Father, dear, dear Father...."

In a fit of unutterable pity and love she kissed the hem of his coat. A heavy silence descended.

"Father, I've never deceived you. I've worshipped you always. And I haven't changed. This doesn't harm anyone but you."

"Why didn't you want to marry, then? Or maybe *he* doesn't want to marry you?"

"It was I who didn't want to marry."

"Why?"

"If he's good, he'll always love me anyhow. If he isn't, I'll be better off this way. I shall always be able to leave him, and no one will ever dare to take my children from

me. I don't want lies, Father. It'll be hard at first, but with time that'll change. We'll live well, Father—we'll live honestly. You'll see, and you'll forgive me."

Bakharev, pale as a sheet, said nothing. He drew himself up to his full height and mutely showed his daughter the door.

## VII

The time between Christmas and Shrovetide, and then also the penitent days of the Great Fast, flew by for Privolov like a dream. He was drawn willy-nilly into the day-to-day affairs, interests and sensations of the little uyezd town. At times an unaccountable sense of grief overtook him and he moped for several days running.

"Have you heard the latest?" Khiona asked him during one of these periods of depression.

"What?"

"Nadine's gone."

"What d'you mean?"

"Just that. She up and went to her brother's. The whole town's talking about it. They say it was a love-affair. You know Loskutov, don't you? Well, he was in love with Nadine, it turned out, while Zosya Lyakhovskaya was in love with him. A regular triangle! Do you remember the ball, and Zosya's sickness? I had a feeling there was something behind it. Now we have the answer. The whole town's talking."

"People say the damndest things sometimes," Privolov observed.

"I'll stake my head on it, to the last word. Oh, by the way, have you heard Vasily Bakharev has gone to Siberia? Yes. Someone gave him the money. Danila Shelekhov went with him. I was there the other day. Marya is absolutely dejected and Vera is in tears. Whatever you

say, it's the talk of the town—the old man being faced with ruin, and a girl of marrying age on his hands.”

The news shocked Privalov and he set out instantly to visit the Bakharevs. On the way he still tried to make himself believe that Khiona had twisted the facts and added some of her own invention, but Luka's woebegone countenance dispelled all his false hopes.

“Our firebird—she's flown the nest,” the old servitor mumbled while helping Privalov out of his coat; there were tears in his eyes, and his hands shook. “The old master has left for the mines about a week ago. No telling whether he'll make it before the spring floods.”

In a parlour in Marya Bakhareva's half of the house he was met by Vera. She greeted him as icily as the few times before, something one could scarcely have expected from the bread-and-butter miss that she was. Marya's reception was just as cold and the old lady continuously complained of a headache.

“I thought you had gone to Petersburg,” she said with painful indifference.

The old Bakharev house appeared like a tomb to Privalov. Not a single word was said of Nadine, as though she did not exist. For the first time Privalov became painfully conscious that he was a stranger in this old-fashioned house which he so dearly loved. Walking through the low cozy little rooms he nursed a kind of superstitious hope, as people often do after the death of a dear one, of running into Nadine.

His old love, like a seed dropped into the soil in autumn, long covered with a layer of winter snow, sprouted again in Privalov's heart. He compared the present with the dreams he had had a mere six months ago. How stupid and mortifying everything was in this happy present of his! Privalov became acutely conscious of the spiritual vacuum and distress of his present happiness, and was frightened by his own thoughts.



Only Veryovkin's letter from Petersburg somewhat consoled him in his black despondency. Nicolas wrote that his suspicions had been correct and that Uncle Oscar had really spun a veritable cobweb of intrigue, and had been ready to pounce when he, Nicolas, appeared on the scene as a most unpleasant surprise and messed up his hand. Veryovkin described all his tribulations, both official and otherwise: how he had called on the powers-that-be, how he was led about by the nose, and how, in the end, he had achieved what he was after, making use of all his brazen insolence, acquired during his many years in the provinces. In a postscript he said a very influential someone, one who carried considerable weight in the Senate, was showing an interest in their case. "At first," Nicolas wrote, "I was like a babe in the woods, but after looking about I saw they were all mortals, these people. God willing, we'll score a resounding victory. Uncle will get it hard; it'll be a lesson for him to keep his homespun nose out of the business of thoroughbreds."

Agrippina's Thursdays positively became the talk of the town, because Privalov was prominently featured in them. Many called at the Veryovkins' just to have a glimpse of him and rest their eyes on Agrippina's good fortune in bringing off such an extraordinarily happy match for her youngest daughter; only out-and-out fools could still doubt that Privalov was going to marry Alla.

It was at one of these Thursdays that the little incident occurred which had so many repercussions. The attendance was particularly big—lawyers, engineers, an itinerant opera singer and very many ladies. Privalov was there, of course, and everyone saw how he turned the music sheets when Alla was playing her sonata. Khiona was in great form, French gushing out of her as though she was stuffed with it. In the heat of the moment she even failed to notice that the smile on Agrippina's

lips had long since faded and that the hostess's eyebrows were anxiously raised.

At the height of the *soirée*, just as Khiona raised a spoonful of strawberry preserve to her mouth, Agrippina called her aside and said in a muffled voice:

"Khiona, why, for heaven's sake, do you insist on that French of yours?"

It seemed to Khiona that her ears were deceiving her. Her smile froze on her face. Then the implication of Agrippina's words flashed to her consciousness. She trembled from head to foot at the insult and could scarcely frame her words:

"What d'you mean by 'that French of *yours*'?"

"Oh, nothing," Agrippina replied. "You're embarrassing me; everybody's laughing at your atrocious pronunciation."

"I? Embarrassing *you*? My atrocious pronunciation? And you say this to me, Agrippina?"

"My sweetest Khiona, please, please, don't be offended," Agrippina tried hard to sugar her pill, but it was too late, much too late.

At first Khiona turned red and drew up to her full height. Next minute she returned to the parlour, took her shawl from the chair with a self-righteous gesture and swam out majestically into the hallway with unseeing eyes, like an insulted queen who magnanimously surrenders the wrong-doers to the torments of their own conscience.

"So my pronunciation shocks Agrippina!" That was the thought which burned her brain like a drop of sulphuric acid on her way home from the Veryovkins.

"She thinks if Antonida is Privalov's mistress, she can insult me," the worthy lady reasoned with the logic of outraged womankind, wringing her hands in unspent fury.

"Her husband is a card-sharp; her son—a sergeant-at-law; her daughter—a kept woman, and she herself a God-forsaken Riga German who comes thirteen to the dozen!"

### VIII

Everything seemed to change between Privalov and Antonida after this deplorable incident. To begin with, they could no longer meet in Khiona's parlour. Nor was it safe to meet at the club, where the embittered Khiona was likely to make some untoward display. Nevertheless, Antonida made several appearances there, seemingly for the sole purpose of provoking that worthy. She was now playing with fire, and the greater the danger, the more pleasure she seemed to derive from it. It was something like an obstacle race for madcap thrills. She seemed to delight in dragging Privalov out of one critical situation into another. The composure with which she extricated herself and her lover out of the numerous scrapes of her own doing, was truly remarkable. And whenever Privalov objected, she showered him with caustic reproaches.

"Coward," she said to him with a challenging smile, egging him on to some risky undertaking.

On two occasions she kept him with her until the grey of dawn. Her husband used to while the nights away at the "Magnet" and returned in the morning hours, after Privalov's departure. But the third time Antonida kept Privalov too long, and they were on the brink of disaster. In the middle of the night they suddenly heard a carriage drive up, and the bell ring in the hallway.

"It's Alexander!" Antonida exclaimed.

Privalov's position was desperate; he heard Polovodov speaking with the butler in the hallway. It was plain from his tone and from the way he drew out his words that he was in his cups. Privalov stood undecidedly in the middle of the room, not knowing what to do.

"Why are you standing there like a fool?" Antonida hissed, and pushed him into the adjoining chamber. "Wait here. He's drunk and will soon fall asleep. I'll let you out then."

While Polovodov was making his way to the bedroom, Antonida concealed all traces of Privalov's presence and pretended to be asleep. Privalov found himself in an untenable position. He was slumped in an armchair, holding his breath; the blood rushed to his head and his knees trembled from excitement. He heard Polovodov cross the bedroom with unsteady steps, place the candle on the night-table and begin to undress.

"Aren't you asleep?" Polovodov uttered gently when his wife opened her eyes.

"No, can't you see?" Antonida replied drily.

"I've just been to the Lyakhovskys," Polovodov said ingratiatingly.

"I can see that!"

"I swear to you, Tony, I'm not lying!"

"I didn't ask you to swear, did I? What difference does it make?"

"There, there. Are you angry? But I love you," Polovodov pleaded.

"You do? You've probably just come from the 'Magnet'?"

"Yes, I dropped in for just a single minute, dear—just a single minute, I tell you. Didn't even take my coat off."

A deep silence set in. Polovodov snapped his fingers and shook his head with a self-contented leer.

"You're a clever girl, Tony."

"*Merci.*"

"No, I'm serious: a very clever little girl. Have you heard? Ah, but that makes no difference. Khe-khe! It isn't that at all."

"What is it then?"

"You served us a good turn, darling."

"What are you talking about?"

Polovodov smiled, and then said in an undertone:

"Remember, I asked you to see that Privalov shouldn't feel lonesome here in Uzel?"

"What about it?"

"Well, d'you know the rumours? Ha-ha! Some idiot tried to hint to me today. Honest to God! You know, you're thought to be on an intimate footing with that fool Privalov. Ha-ha-ha! I laughed my head off."

"I've had enough of your silly talk," Antonida interrupted.

"It isn't silly. Ha-ha-ha! Privalov has played the fool, all right, eh? He's really pressed his suit with you, hasn't he? I know, but I make no objection. D'you know the whole story? Remember your Uncle Oscar? I've had a telegram from him today."

"Leave me alone, please, I'm not interested in all your affairs. I have a headache."

"No, listen. If Privalov had gone to Petersburg, things would have looked black for us—me, and Lyakhovsky, and Uncle Oscar. We would have been checkmated. Remember, I asked you last time to talk Privalov out of going at all costs, even if it meant giving him hope? Ha-ha! I don't care a whit what there was between you and him as long as he stayed in Uzel and sent Nicolas instead. He's let the case slip through his fingers."

"I can't make head or tail of it. You're drunk, you don't know what you're saying."

"I do—I do, dearest! You're a clever little girl! Nicolas can still upset our apple-cart, but then we'll think of something new. Necessity is the mother of invention."

## IX

Spring set in all at once. The remnants of snow in the depressions and deep ravines thawed quickly; the first run of grass shot up by the water, and as far as the eye could see the countryside was spattered with black patches of ploughed-up soil amongst yellow squares of resting land and the tender green of the winter crop. The warble of the skylark rang out in the fields, and grave-looking rooks dug about in the black earth. The sowing was at its height.

At this busy time Privalov put his little three-windowed cottage into shape, and moved into it early in May. The other half of the building was still occupied by Tyolkin and Nagibin. Work on the flour mill had stopped, for they were looking for new labourers. All his spare time, of which Privalov now had a goodly share, he spent in the fields, making a first-hand acquaintance with the peasant's trade.

One day in the middle of May, as Privalov trudged wearily from the fields to his little abode he saw Nagibin running to him, shouting from afar:

"Sergei Alexandrovich, have you heard the news? They brought Lyakhovsky to the Laletin spa. He's at death's door."

"What's that?"

"He's lost the use of his tongue, and the right half of his body. It's a sad story! His daughter only just got well. Now it's he. They brought their own doctor. You ought to visit him, Sergei Alexandrovich."

"You may be right," Privalov said hesitantly. "I've been wanting to see him for a long time."

A wicker-work carriage, one of those widely used in the Urals, drawn by two bony Kirghiz horses, waited at Privalov's door the next morning. Stepan, a Garchiki muzhik who had left the soil through want of good sense and

scraped up a living as a menial, was installed in the box. As the four-wheeler rolled briskly along the meandering country road, lurching and swaying on its supple rowan wood frame past endless fields, Privalov for the first time experienced that blissful sense of peace which he envied in others. He took a delight in everything—the ploughed-up fields and the budding winter crops, the soft black-earth country road and the spanking pace of the horses, and even the broad, patched back of Stepan, who jerked his elbows funnily in the lurches and kept adjusting his shabby sheepskin cap. Privalov was deeply conscious of his good health and felt a sense of pity for Lyakhovsky. He had seen him last before Shrovetide, and the old man had been in good spirits and making plans for the future.

“Well, there’s Laletinka,” Stepan said as they drove up an eminence.

Below them, at the foot of the hillock, the Laletinka River described a wide curve, washing away the steep sandy bank covered with young pines. About a hundred peasant huts clustered along the river bend, almost as though they were laid out to dry in the sunshine. The wooden structure of the spa above the chalybeate spring, the long verandah where music was played during the holiday season and patients promenaded, and the elongated, clumsy-looking hotel, were visible from afar. Along the river-bank on the right up to a dozen plain baths were strung out, covered with new canvas. The view of the village was breath-taking, although the spa was still desolate. Most patients came to the baths about the end of May. As the wicker-work carriage drew up at the door of the hotel, which had a flag on its roof, several wan, sickly faces looked down at Privalov from the first storey. Among them was Dr. Khlyudzinsky, who was head of the spa. In the lobby Privalov ran his eyes over the board of visitors and found five adjoining rooms registered in Lyakhovsky’s name.

"Who are you looking for, master?" an attendant in a black cutaway and white tie asked him.

"I should like to see Dr. Sarayev."

"I'll announce you."

In a moment he was back with the doctor, who smiled at Privalov's wrinkled riding-habit and shook his hand.

"I've come to see how you are," Privalov said, entering the doctor's room.

The disorder which travellers always bring with them reigned in the little ground-floor room occupied by the doctor. A half-open suit-case stood in the corner, a mud-spattered overcoat hung on the wall, and surgical instruments were laid out on the window-sill alongside an open tin of tobacco. At first Privalov scarcely noticed the young girl with cropped golden hair sitting on the oil-skin sofa in the corner. When she nodded to him with a smile, he became conscious that he had seen her thin, pallid face with its chiselled profile and large dark eyes somewhere before.

"You don't recognize me?" a familiar feminine voice asked him.

"Zosya! Good heavens! Can it be you?" Privalov stepped back in surprise.

"In person. Grown older, haven't I? I must be a sight if old friends don't recognize me," Zosya said, looking at Privalov's healthy frame with the envy of a convalescent.

"We were just talking about you, Sergei Alexandrovich," the doctor said. "Zosya is interested in your flour mill."

"Yes, yes," the girl confirmed eagerly. "And not the mill alone, but your entire undertaking, of which, to my regret, I learned only third-hand."

"I had no idea you could be interested in the mill."

"Oh, on the contrary, we're all interested in it," the doctor replied. "And have even made plans of visiting you. Our patient prevented us."



"Could I see him?" Privalov asked. "I didn't come on business—just to pay a visit."

"Father will be glad to see you," Zosya spoke up. "But he can't say anything yet, though he recognizes all of us. He was a bit better, but the trip was hard on him."

When the doctor left the room to see to his patient, the girl said:

"Really, Father had almost recovered and walked about on crutches when that Alfons Bogdanich turned up. You probably know who I mean. I have no idea what passed between them—but Father had a stroke."

"If you want to visit him, he'll be glad to see you," the doctor stated, reappearing in the doorway.

Two doors down the corridor Privalov recognized the sickroom by the carpet draping the door. The suite, its walls and floor, were hung and laid with Tashkent rugs; a weak light filtered in through the curtains, illuminating something white, suggestive of a bundle of washing, on an American folding bed. There was the strong smell of ether and a pungent spirit of wine. The doctor led Privalov gently to the side of the bed next to a night-table cluttered with medicines and vials of all shapes and kinds. Privalov made out the patient's head wrapped in something white. His eyes were half-closed and his mouth screwed to the side most unpleasantly. A weak movement of the left arm was all the patient could accomplish to show that he was alive.

"Father, how are you?" the girl asked, approaching the other side of the bed. "Sergei Alexandrovich has come specially to see you."

A weak movement of the arm, which then dropped limply, was the only answer, and the eyes seemed to open wider, the consciousness of a living being flickering in them. Privalov spent about a quarter of an hour at the old man's bedside. The doctor motioned to him to leave the room, fearing that his mute visit might fatigue the

patient. When Privalov was making his farewells, the girl said:

"Don't go. Have dinner with us. We won't take 'no' for an answer. Informal—we're in the country after all."

The dinner was laid in a room which served as parlour and dining-room. Pani Marina and David made their appearance. Privalov felt awkward in his riding-habit and rued the moment when he had agreed to stay. Pani Marina treated the guest with insipid worldly unctuousness. To fall in with the lady's tone Privalov had to summon up all his knowledge of the world of fashion. His touching efforts were shared by the doctor.

"What a robust man you look in our midst," Zosya said artlessly, turning to Privalov in the middle of dinner. "We are miserable-looking creatures by your side: Mother isn't quite well, David's his usual self, and the doctor has a sallow look. As for me, I had the fright of my life yesterday when I looked in the mirror—I'm a fly-blown wax doll."

"Let's leave things in the hands of the best healer—the invigorating country air," the doctor said.

Privalov breathed a sigh of relief when, at long last, the dinner was over and he could make his departure.

"Should you ever want to see my mill," Privalov said, shaking Zosya's hand, "I'd be happy to show you around."

"Without fail, Sergei Alexandrovich," Zosya replied cheerfully, tossing her head. "We'll come—the doctor and I."

## X

Now we must go back a bit to a day late in April, when Lyakhovsky was beginning to get well and wander about his study on crutches. He had neglected his affairs in the three months of his sickness, and was making up for lost time. He lay in wait for Alfons Bogdanich in the early

hours of the morning, flushed with anger over many ticklish matters that had lodged in his head since the night before.

At last the door creaked and Alfons Bogdanich appeared in the doorway with a shabby brief-case stuffed full of papers.

"I hope the master's precious person is well," the manager spoke with a honeyed tongue, bowing low and taking his usual place at the writing-desk.

"Hope if you care," Lyakhovsky replied drily. "You were likely hoping for the contrary, but God willed that I should return to good health. Yes! Perhaps you were hoping I'd die, to take possession of my money and my property? Confess, Alfons Bogdanich, you wouldn't have hesitated to clean me out. Eh? I can see it by your face. You would have taken everything, down to the shroud. I know it! You'd leave Pani Marina and Zosya without a kopek. Oh, don't deny it! It's no use."

Alfons Bogdanich smiled. Yes, he smiled. He smiled for the first time. He smiled the placid smile of an independent individual, and looked his patron straight in the eye. Lyakhovsky was struck dumb by this insolence of his humble servant and was on the point of showering him with curses. But Alfons Bogdanich forestalled him. He coolly unclasped his brief-case and extracted a freshly-printed advertisement.

"Here," he said curtly, handing it to Lyakhovsky.

Holding the leaf at arm's length Lyakhovsky ran his eyes down the advertisement, which said: "The Putsillo-Malyakhinsky Trading Company informs the public that our newly-established distilleries, tanneries, candleworks and soap factories are accepting orders. We guarantee timely and scrupulous execution. Our works are in Western Siberia. The main office and warehouses are in the town of Uzel, Sobornaya Street, in the Putsillo-Malyakhinsky House." The advertisement was signed,

"A. B. Putsillo-Malyakhinsky." Lyakhovsky read it three times, scratched his forehead, looked at the back of the paper, and finally said:

"I don't know it. Never heard of it. Who's this Putsillo-Malyakhinsky? A swindler, I'm sure. Never heard the name before."

"Perhaps my honoured master will search his memory," Alfons Bogdanich uttered with an unctuous smile. "My master knew it in bygone years."

"No, I don't recall it."

"My grandfather on my father's side was Putsillo, and my grandfather on my mother's side was Malyakhinsky."

Lyakhovsky stood wide-eyed. His jaw dropped and he sank into his shabby armchair clutching his head which reeled from just a single thought:

"Putsillo-Malyakhinsky—Putsillo-Malyakhinsky. . . ."

"You robbed me," he whispered hollowly. "Every nail in your factories is really mine. D'you realize it? You cleaned me out!"

"No, not at all, master," Alfons Bogdanich replied calmly. "I touched nothing of yours, and whatever I have is the reward of years-long labour."

"Reward of years-long labour! Ha-ha-ha!" Lyakhovsky guffawed wildly, throwing back his head. "Be more precise: reward of years-long robbery!"

"You're mistaken, master," Alfons Bogdanich continued, unperturbed. "You made a fortune out of nothing overnight. I don't have your happy flair, and needed a dozen years to establish my own company. I hope we shan't get in each other's way, and will help each other, provided, of course, that you want it. It depends on you."

"Tell me," Lyakhovsky asked, "how did you do it? You never left my side all these years. Who built your factories for you?"

"Why, I have two nephews on the distaff side of the family, and three on my father's. I sent them to University, and they repaid me for it by building the works."

"You have five nephews?"

"And one niece, master. A fetching girl. Gifted young thing—speaks three languages, paints...."

"Enough, enough! No more."

Lyakhovsky had the sensation of dropping into a pit. All his affairs were in the hands of Alfons Bogdanich, who knew everything under the sun, who managed everything, and who was now no more. Who would replace him? What was worse, he, Lyakhovsky, was not the same any longer. The name of Putsillo-Malyakhinsky pressed down on Lyakhovsky like a rock. He saw that slow ruin lay in store for him.

In the evening he had the stroke.

## XI

People came to the spa towards the close of May. Only half of them were real patients. The others were pleasure-seekers. The summer in the dusty and stuffy town was scarcely attractive.

"Ladies, *mesdames*, and gentlemen, imbibe of our country air!" Dr. Khlyudzinsky kept chanting from morning to night, hastening from one group of visitors to another. "It's all in the air! Look at the Lyakhovskys—the old man was at death's door, his daughter was like a wax doll. And now? Old Lyakhovsky moves about in his wheel-chair, and Zosya's in full bloom, like a Shiraz rose! Yes, *mesdames*. And all thanks to the wholesome country air. The roses on her cheeks serve proof of it."

Acquaintances were struck up with astonishing ease, like at all spas, and the visitors soon broke up into their natural groups—of aristocrats, bourgeois and the new intelligentsia. The Lyakhovskys were naturally at the

head of the aristocracy, and Zosya, hated by all the ladies and girls, was queen of the summer. This popular sentiment united all the heterogeneous elements, and when in the evenings Zosya entered the ballroom she was met by a bristling array of cold, mocking stares. We ought to note that our highly-esteemed Khiona Zaplatina was among her evil-wishers. Her lean constitution had also demanded a summer cure, and she wandered about the spa with a melancholy look. To be precise, she was not sick at all. There was only the longing to distract herself. It was more than she could do to stay in Uzel, upon the ruins of her boarding-school friendship, and she had decided to rest among the delights of nature. But her rest lasted no more than a day. When she showed up at the spa, she was instantly swallowed up by the gaudy tide in which she had floundered all her life. She took an active part in segregating the various groups and headed a stubborn movement against aristocratic privileges, that is, against Zosya Lyakhovskaya, who was always followed by all the young people. In the past she had dealt with the "little monkey" only in passing. Now she tackled the job in dead earnest.

"I'll show her," she decided. "Thinks she's the salt of the earth just because her father has millions."

It was a regular witch-hunt. Zaplatina followed about on Zosya's heels and finally succeeded in attracting the girl's attention.

"Tell me, why does the lady hate me so?" Zosya asked Dr. Sarayev. "She hisses like a snake whenever she sees me. Her face changes—it turns angry, and I'm frightened. Yet I haven't done anything—not a thing."

The doctor only shrugged his shoulders. Indeed, the philosopher has not been born yet who can fathom all the secrets of feminine sympathies and dislikes. He did not venture to tell Zosya that Zaplatina persecuted her for

her beauty and wealth. He let Zosya arrive at the solution on her own.

Later, Zosya happened to catch a sarcastic remark made by Khiona in French.

"Oh, she speaks French—and quite well, too," the girl thought in surprise, scrutinizing the angry-looking lady.

At long last, they happened to exchange words. At first they were dry and hostile, but their conversation finally took a more peaceful turn.

Khiona depicted the people gathered at the spa in most vivid colours and made the young girl laugh until the tears ran down her cheeks; this was followed by a number of word portraits of mutual friends in Uzel, notably the Bakharevs and Veryovkins. And when Zaplatina came to the "arrogant" Polovodov, Zosya laughed uproariously, and ended by waving her arms helplessly.

"You're the first woman I have ever met who does not bore me," Zosya observed, still laughing convulsively.

"As for me, I simply suffocate in the company of all the Veryovkins, Bakharevs and Polovodovs," Khiona confessed in her turn. "Our ladies have nothing on their minds except their finery."

Doctor Sarayev, who had been looking for Zosya, was not a little surprised to find her, traces of tears on her cheeks, in Zaplatina's company.

"Well, good-bye, my dear!" Zosya said, shaking Zaplatina's hand. "We must meet again without fail."

"I'm surprised at your lack of discrimination in choosing new friends," the doctor remarked rigidly on the way to their rooms.

"Oh, you should hear the funny things she says! Haha! She's simply poisonous! No, she's a rare specimen, a woman of the species. I could have died!"

Khiona had the happy flair of turning everything to her own advantage. Her unexpected conversation with Zosya raised a storm of projects and brain waves in her

head: Zosya was no longer a simple little monkey, but the embodiment of all known human virtues—beauty, intelligence, kindness, good humour, wit, and, what was more, the girl was of noble birth—a real thoroughbred, far and away nobler than all the Nadine Bakharevs, Allas, Annas, and *tutti quanti*. Zaplatina savoured Zosya's high descent as she had earlier savoured the magic powers of the Privalov fortune. To put it in a nutshell, Khiona regarded Zosya as the ideal young lady.

"In you, *mon ange*," she told Zosya of her perfections, "every movement is a symphony. Your breeding and blood are evident even in your very failings."

Add to all this that Zosya was the sole heiress to Lyakhovsky's wealth! Zaplatina's head reeled at the thought of all the riches Zosya would one day inherit. All the distilleries in the Trans-Urals, the herds of sheep in the Kirghiz steppes, which yielded lard and soap and candles, the tanneries and glassworks, the million-ruble commercial operations, and all the bumper crops on thousands of dessiatines—all for whom? Zaplatina could not help feeling what a nonentity she was alongside all those gifts of fortune. The worthy lady spoke of Privalov in order to add to her own weight, and presented him as something of a part of herself. Privalov would have had the surprise of his life to hear Khiona praising him to the skies to Zosya. To begin with, he was much like a fairy-land prince who surmounts thousands of obstacles to come into possession of his legitimate rights. Khiona gave the story of Privalov's inheritance a most enticing flavour, and heaped virtues upon him, which, as she put it, did not leap to the eye only because the young man was so utterly modest. Privalov's flour mill and wheat trade were only the beginning of something truly great; he was a hero, and as such would do wonders where ordinary men missed the mark. Zaplatina subtly hinted that the mill and the wheat trade were merely a screen



for Privalov's far-reaching social projects. Indeed, to listen to her, he was a socialist and a very dangerous one, although no one suspected it owing to his crafty modesty. The new Privalov, whom Khiona built up, enthralled even herself, and she soon came to believe her own words.

"Yes, he's unlike all the others," Zosya uttered pensively.

"Of course not! He's an extraordinary creature, *mon ange!*"

"Tell me, was he really in love with Nadine Bakhareva?" Zosya asked suddenly.

Khiona was taken aback at first, but then emerged triumphantly from the quandary.

"I can assure you there was nothing serious between them. Just childhood recollections. Furthermore, Nadine behaved ambiguously; and finally, the old Bakharevs were much too intent on having him for a son-in-law. That's all."

Zosya even deigned to pay Zaplatina a visit in her little hut smelling of hens and calves. And, of course, Zaplatina hastened to repay the visit, turning up at the Lyakhovskys' in her best silk dress two days later. Everything was fine while Khiona was with Zosya in the girl's room, but when they went to the dining-room she stumbled into all kinds of difficulties. First, Pani Marina treated her and her French with such icy courtesy that a hundred cats seemed to claw at her heart, and, second, David, who knew her well for what she was, was much too familiar in his treatment of her, which she would rather have avoided on her first visit.

Her spirits were clouded, and out of self-preservation she ceased all further visits to the Lyakhovskys. Furthermore, the contempt she read in old Lyakhovsky's face when he saw her was not to her taste at all, although he, a convalescent, could well be excused; the doctor's forced cordiality also shocked Khiona's fashion-abiding soul.

Zosya, it is true, treated Khiona well, but that itself made her all the more anxious to preserve her prestige with the girl and not jeopardize it through the untoward behaviour of the other members of Zosya's family.

Khiona had a bright idea.

"I'm surprised, *mon ange*," she told Zosya one day, "that you bury yourself in summer within four walls when you have the chance of making quite different arrangements—like an Eastern queen."

Zosya drank *kumys*, brought for her by the Bashkirs from somewhere near Krasny Lug. Wouldn't it be fun to live the life of those nomads? She would have a tent pitched near the Bashkir camp. It could be a Tekin tent, white felt hung with Bukhara carpets. That would be fun. Everything to the last nail could be arranged in the nomadic style. How original! What *parties de plaisir* she, Zosya, could have there! It would be a novelty, spending six weeks in a tent, virtually out in the open, among the wild riders of the steppe. It was worth trying, wasn't it?

Zosya gave Zaplatina a hug for her unusual brain wave.

"But I beg you, *mon ange*," Zaplatina said, "pass it off as your own idea. I have a feeling your family is prejudiced against me and may intervene if they learn that I suggested it."

"Very well," Zosya replied. "But on one condition: we'll live there together."

Khiona made a half-hearted pretence of refusing. Then she agreed. She would thus no longer have to pay visits to the Lyakhovskys, and would herself be an independent factor in the game, come what may.

Zosya's scheme was well met. Particularly by the doctor, because it was indeed much better to get the benefits of country life at first hand rather than wander aimlessly about the spa building.

A special messenger was immediately dispatched to Troitsk, the nearest trading centre, to acquire four tents—

one for Žosya, another for the stablemen, a third for the female retinue, and a fourth just in case, i.e., for guests. The messenger was back in a week; a suitable site for the tents was picked at once and the brain wave translated into reality. The spot was delightful. It was on the high bank of a nameless little river several steps away from a shady birch wood, in a circle of thick green undulating grass strewn with millions of multi-coloured flowers. The Bashkir nomadic camp livened up the scenery. A noisy, half-naked mob of children fussed about near the shabby-looking, torn tents. The Bashkir women—these humble beasts of burden in the spirit of good old Asiatic morals—were busy there day and night and there were the men themselves, ever idle, sipping *kumys* and riding their shaggy little horses. Bright lights burnt near the tents after nightfall, and monotonous Bashkir songs melted in the placid air, telling of the brave deeds of Bashkir warriors, and especially the renowned Salawat. Some ten versts away was the village of Krasny Lug.

## XII

Living outdoors, Zosya rapidly regained her health. She spent most of her time outside. Teck and Batir, her favourite horses, were brought out from Uzel. Zosya liked to go for long outings on horseback accompanied by the doctor. Khiona had also attempted to join them. One day she conquered her schoolgirlish fear of saddled horses and had even, with Ilya's help, mounted Batir. But as the horse broke into an easy canter she tumbled out of the saddle like a bird shot in flight, and slightly sprained her ankle. She could do no more than submit to fate and sit it out in the tent while Zosya tore about on horseback.

During one such outing Zosya and the doctor approached to within hailing distance of Garchiki.

"There's Privalov's mill," the doctor pointed to a wide-flung pond and a half-built building. "If you like, we'll call on Sergei Alexandrovich."

"By all means," Zosya agreed.

They found Privalov on the building site. He climbed out of somewhere in the bottom storey, dressed in a coarse cloth shag jacket and baggy trousers; the tight rimmed collar of a Russian shirt attractively invested his wide neck. A nondescript cap was pulled low over his eyes, and when Zosya proffered him her hand clad in a grey Swedish glove with a patent-leather top, he smilingly pulled back his hand which he had stretched out instinctively.

"I'm afraid I'll soil your glove," he exclaimed, but Zosya insisted on shaking hands with him.

"We came with the express purpose of getting in your way," the girl joked, flinging the train of her riding-habit gracefully over her left arm. "Show us your achievements."

Privalov took the visitors to the mill and Zosya, heedless of her riding-habit, explored all the corners of the building.

A quick tea was laid in the little cottage. Nagibin personally "boiled" the samovar and brought it to the tea-table with quite a flourish.

At table, as Zosya poured out the tea, the doctor adroitly turned their conversation to agriculture and then passed over to the wheat trade and the flour mill. At first Privalov spoke unwillingly, but was finally carried away. The girl put several questions to him, which showed that, far from being idly curious, she had a sincere desire to learn more of the matter. While Privalov spoke, she scrutinized his tanned, kind face. The candid expression in his brown eyes and the confidence and calm of his movements created just the impression Khiona Zaplatina had prepared with all her talk. At that moment,

Privalov really did look to Zosya like a hero—a man who stood out distinctly among the others.

"I'll be expecting you," Zosya said to Privalov in parting. "Come to our camp. It's a two hours' ride from your mill."

As the doctor and Zosya, who had mounted their horses, broke into a canter, heading for Krasny Lug, Nagibin observed:

"Lord, where did they ever find mounts like that? The miss is a born horsewoman. Plucky, and no mistake."

Zosya's visit brought Privalov back to the life he had given up. He was attracted to her.

Three days later, he was riding a bay along the road to Krasny Lug, holding the horse in to admire the magnificent landscape. Oats had taken well that year and so had the wheat, pushing up pale green out of the earth. The day was blazing hot; the simmering air quivered, and exhalations hung heavily over the endless fields. Grasshoppers chirped merrily in the grass, and somewhere, unseen, a landrail sang its screeching song. Little birds, like rockets, kept shooting into the air, out of the dust-powdered roadside grass, and vanished rapidly in the distance. A small thunder-cloud crept slowly along the horizon from the direction of the Laletin spa, and a slanting strip of rain watering the fields was visible from afar, while the other side of the sky was bathed in blinding sunshine. Privalov thought how good it would be if the rain-cloud would pass over the Garchiki fields, whose young growth was in bad need of moisture. Father Savvyl had prayed for it at two services and the icons had even been taken out to the fields. These agricultural thoughts vanished like the birds when his horse shied suddenly. A large hare scurried by under its legs and bounded off into the oat-field.

"A bad omen," Privalov thought aloud, then chuckled at his own superstition. "Why on earth am I going

there?" he mused the next minute, and even reined in his mount.

From atop the elevation he saw the mill-pond far behind him, and in front the curling smoke of the Bashkir encampment on the river-bank. The words of a popular Russian fairy-tale came to his mind. "If you go right," it said, "you will be fed but your horse will go hungry; if you go left, your horse will be fed but you will go hungry; and if you go straight you will lose your horse, and your head to boot." Yet he spurred the horse on in the direction of the encampment. Nostrils dilated, sensing the grazing herd of Bashkir horses, his mount arched its graceful neck and broke into a brisk canter.

Approaching Zosya's tents Privalov glimpsed a lady watching him from under her raised palm. "Could it be Pani Marina?" Privalov wondered, but the next minute discovered with surprise that it was his precious landlady, Khiona Zaplatina. She even waved her hand to him.

"What a small world!" Privalov grinned, handing the reins of his pacer to Ilya.

"Oh, it's a long story!" Khiona exclaimed facetiously. "You know me. It was after you left. The doctor urged me to go to the spa. And so I'm here. That's the way I am. Then, I happened to meet Zosya."

Zosya was unwell and received Privalov in her tent, where he sat cross-legged on a little low divan. The hostess was absorbed in taming a steppe falcon. The bird skulked before her on a low wooden perch, opening its beak wide every time she wanted to stroke its smoky-grey plumage.

"Ill-mannered bird," Zosya observed, jerking back her hand. "Third day I'm working on it. It's pecked my hands raw."

She showed Privalov her hands, scarred and scratched.

"Why bother with it?" Privalov asked, looking with surprise round the tent.

"I want to break it in. We'll go falconing then. You'll come, of course, won't you? It's fun. I've always wanted to try."

Privalov nodded, stretching his hand out to stroke the bird.

"It's the real thing—falconing is," Zosya went on. "Dogs can't compare with it. Hunting with firearms is slaughter. Falconing isn't. It has the element of risk and danger."

In her semi-Eastern setting Zosya looked unusually attractive. Clad in a plain summer dress, she was much like an expensive painting set in a colourful frame of Bukhara carpets. This mingling of the European and Mid-Asian was strikingly vivid, and Privalov felt himself carried from Europe to the Orient, that realm of poetic dreams, that fairyland of bewitching fantasy and fabulously beautiful maidens. The gaudy hodge-podge of faded carpets roused the poet in him.

In her role of chaperone Khiona kept modestly in the background, pulling a grave face whenever Zosya laughed too loud. She soon gave Privalov to understand that she was practically one of the family.

"I must confess, Sergei Alexandrovich," Zosya declared when Khiona left the tent, "that I'm terribly bored at times. This endless indolence, this ghastly vacuum! Tell me, what must a girl do? This isn't living. It's existing, that's what it is. Even my pleasures are tainted by the sense of my own inutility."

"You can find something to do if you want it hard enough."

"You mean I could deceive myself with a spectre of work—set up a dressmaker's, or a school, or, maybe, enroll in some courses. But I don't care for any of those things. I want the kind of work that would absorb all of me, the kind of work I couldn't do without. I feel deeply for all those politicians, for all those men who battle for

their ideal. Take you, for example. Here you are, buried in your mill, nothing can divert you from it, the sense that every passing day is an indictment of your nonentity does not bother you. You know, I've given some thought to your plans. If you hadn't discovered this America of yours before me, I should have taken up the wheat trade myself. A clear goal always makes one happy."

"Don't you know that it wasn't I—that my America was discovered long before my time?"

"I do, I do. But here's the important thing: people grasp the justice of an idea, some of them tackle it, then the idea gradually pales and is forgotten. The important thing is that someone like you comes to the fore, casts off all prejudices and revives it. Remember Timur Lenk, who watched the ant which tried forty times to carry a grain to the top of a mound and rolled down with it just as many times. But the forty-first time it reached its goal."

"You seem to misunderstand, Zosya," Privalov said. "My plans entail the effort of not one man alone, not of two either, but of a hundred—a thousand. I am quite certain that the thousand will come in the end and complete what you and I shall fail to accomplish."

"You and I?"

"Well, why shouldn't you work in the same direction? You are perfectly equipped for it."

"What about my sense of inutility? I feel as though I'm in irons. Ah, but I'm decidedly in the dumps today. I'm sure I bore you."

The relations between Zosya and Privalov, encouraged by the doctor, soon grew to be friendly. Privalov came to the encampment more and more frequently. He enjoyed Zosya's company, free and easy as it was, although at times the girl had her habitual sudden fancies. It was one of her whims, for example, to make the acquaintance of Father Savyol, whom Privalov had described to her in great detail. One fine morning Privalov and Father Sa-



vyol arrived on horseback at the encampment, and Zosya was in raptures over the eccentric priest, whose venomous and embittered intellect amused her greatly. Zosya's tent presented a strange sight, Father Savyol sitting cross-legged on a soft Bukhara carpet and Zosya initiating him into the secrets of dominoes.

"Are you really going to waste your life as a village priest?" Zosya asked him.

"No—I'll take the monastic vow."

"O-oh," Zosya mused, then added, "but while you still haven't renounced our sinful world, won't you come again with Sergei Alexandrovich?"

### XIII

Zosya was not pulling the wool over Privalov's eyes. She really had fits of spleen when she sat immobile for hours on end. These spells of low spirits worried the doctor greatly, but he had no remedy for them.

One day, when Zosya languished pale and impassive on her bed, Khiona darted into her tent.

"The snob—the snob's coming!" she shouted, waving her hands.

"You must be mistaken," the girl uttered indifferently.

"Mistaken? Why, I'd recognize the snob a hundred versts away. He sits a horse like a dried cod, shanks dangling like a pair of sticks."

"Where are you going?" Zosya called out as Zaplatina made for the exit.

"Where? Think I'd stay to look at the peacock? Never! I'm poor, but I also have my pride."

A minute later Pclovodov entered the tent. He lingered in the door for a minute, his eyes searching for the girl, then approached her, kissed her pale hand in silence, and in silence placed a blue satin egg on silver legs on the little stool before her.

"I didn't expect to see you looking so sad," he said, sinking to the floor Turkish fashion. "I came to divert you—the baby that burned its fingers."

"Much obliged."

She pressed a silver button and the egg sprang open. Inside, upon a white satin pillow, a little bear-cub with a black shaggy snout slept serenely like an infant, showing its small teeth. The girl gave a soft exclamation of surprise and shook Polovodov's hand mutely, the hand of this old, faithful friend who was always so good to her. His courting never palled on Zosya because he kept changing his behaviour every time she saw him. The gift just described was the *chef-d'oeuvre* of his inventive mind, and Zosya was well aware that no one else in the world could ever have thought of such a splendid surprise. Polovodov was pleased with the impression his present had created; not for nothing had he thought about it for the past two months while engrossed in various operations at the Uzel-Mokhov Bank.

"You've brought news, haven't you?" Zosya asked, taking the cub out of the egg. The little animal yawned sweetly and looked round with shining blue eyes. "What a funny little fellow!"

While Zosya played with the cub, which licked her hands and scratched her with its pudgy paws, Polovodov unloaded his stock of Uzel gossip. Boring in winter, the backwoods were sickeningly dead in summer.

"Is that all?" Zosya asked wearily when Polovodov wound up his tale.

"No, just a bit more," Polovodov uttered hesitantly. "Only it doesn't seem that you're in the right mood to hear me out."

"I shall," Zosya retorted capriciously; she loved to order her admirer about and, with true feminine cruelty, tormented him with her countless whims.

"See here, Zosya," Polovodov began quietly, lowering his head, "I shall speak to you as an old and loyal friend."

"Oh no, anything but your compassion!" the girl groaned.

"You misunderstand, Zosya."

She did not reply. He cracked his fingers nervously. It was one of his low-bred habits, of which he sometimes forgot.

"You know very well that I worship woman," he said finally with that tone of sincerity he knew how to apply in a crisis. "It's my credo. But I do not worship woman for her beauty alone. Much more than that. I worship her for being a great power. Just look at all the ridiculous things we do for the woman we love! The most sober and hard-hearted lose their heads and shock the world with their childish folly. Remember the famous French lawyer who, in all crimes, said, '*Cherchez la femme*'? That's a self-evident truth, as real as the fact that we are born of woman. If it were a matter of comparisons, I'd compare woman's influence with the latent heat which physicists say joins infinitesimal atoms of matter and moves worlds."

Zosya was still.

"I've known you since you were a child, Zosya, and you know that I've always loved you," Polovodov went on thickly, his head dropping still lower. "You used to scratch me like a kitten, but even if you had whipped me, I should have kissed your hand. For me you are the ideal of feminine beauty. What's more, you are clever and quick. Of course anyone can fall prey to love, anyone is inevitably the victim of folly, but when the ground gives way underfoot, when the world tumbles about one's ears, one always finds solace in faith. And you have always been my solace."

"A strange foreword—makes me feel I'm going to be hanged," she uttered impatiently. "I don't care to be a victim of your eloquence."

"Very well, I'll try to be brief," Polovodov replied drily, his face impassive. "Do you know, dear Zosya, that you're on the brink of ruin? No? Naturally, because your father himself doesn't even suspect it. Putsillo-Malyakhinsky has made a muddle of all your father's affairs."

"What Putsillo-Malyakhinsky? D'you mean Alfons Bogdanich? Why don't you say so?"

"That's just the point," Polovodov continued. "There is no more Alfons Bogdanich. There's only Putsillo-Malyakhinsky, who, like a mushroom, thrives on the ruins of your wealth. I've spoken with your new manager and had a look at the books; everything is an unspeakable mess, and it'll be a good thing if you can make ends meet in the event of a sale. Of course, your father's name rates high, but what if a second stroke follows the first? In the business world wealth is a soap bubble which bursts into a myriad rainbow fragments. Isn't old Bakharev totally bankrupt? Aren't many others? And all due to trifles."

"That's all very well—and very convincing, but I don't see what it has to do with me."

"Well, allow me. Don't you know about the Privalov trusteeship and haven't you heard that Nicolas has started a lawsuit against us, the trustees? Well, it's very complicated, and we may be held responsible for all the negligence of the past twenty years. We had hopes, but they've been dashed. A scandalous lawsuit is imminent; we may be accused of fraud, which means exile to none-too-distant Siberia. Think of your sick father in the dock. The disgrace of it will kill him. If he doesn't die before the case opens, he will then."

"I gather from what you say that you think I can save you in some way," Zosya interposed.

"No, a thousand times no, Zosya," Polovodov exclaimed. "I'm speaking of your father, not of myself. I'm no lion, and you're not a mouse to gnaw through the net that holds me captive. It's a matter of you and your father. I have nothing to do with it. You love your father, and he, stubborn as all old men, is dragging everyone to the edge of an abyss. I repeat, I'm not thinking of myself. It depends upon you to save your father and yourself."

"Make yourself clear," Zosya ordered coolly.

"Hm," Polovodov faltered, then said uncertainly: "Marry that Privalov."

For an instant Zosya kept silent, then she looked piercingly at Polovodov and said softly:

"What if I—what if I love *that* Privalov whom you think such a fool?"

"So much the better," Polovodov replied mechanically, scarcely believing his own ears.



# **PART**

## **FIVE**





**R**ENOVATION work on the old Privalov mansion in Uzel was in full swing. New plastering replaced the old. The roof was being repainted and the windows fitted with new panes. The workmen cleared all the rubbish accumulated in odd corners of the estate, and even the ancient garden was being attended to. Its tumble-down arbours and summer houses, bridges and weed-grown alleys were all being restored. The fur was also flying inside the house. Floors were laid anew, the parquet changed, the murals retouched. The walls were being hung with new wall-paper. Hundreds of workmen were busy day and night, like ants, filling the old mansion with the busy hum of labour.

The contractors had been specially brought out from Petersburg and Warsaw. Regular shipments arrived from the capital of expensive furniture, wall-paper, tapestry, carpets, bronze decorations, carriages and a thousand and one other items that are part of a wealthy home.

Work went on at a fever pitch. Everything was supposed to be ready by October, when the Lyakhovskys were to return from their Bashkir estate.

The reader has no doubt guessed that this flurry of activity was caused by Zosya's forthcoming marriage to Privalov. The wedding was on everyone's lips. Uzel spoke of it as of an outstanding event.

Privalov made only brief appearances in town to supervise and hasten the contractors, and then disappeared again. All the plans and drafts for the reconstruction were submitted for approval to Zosya; she studied them attentively and when in difficulty consulted Khiona Zaplatina or Polovodov, who had become a permanent fixture at the Lyakhovskys'. Privalov viewed him with misgivings at first, but Zosya would not hear of any compromise, and he had no choice but to submit. However,

Polovodov himself, aware of his ticklish position, did his best to stay out of Privalov's way. Zosya laughed heartily over this mutual hostility and assured Privalov that he would come to like her peerless Polovodov as soon as he learned his rare qualities.

"I can't see, Zosya, why you are so fond of this—this unbearable individual, to say the least," Privalov would approach her at a propitious moment. "He's an obsession with you."

"Good heavens! Can't you understand? Polovodov is amusing, and I adore funny people," Zosya replied lightly. "I like Khiona for the very same reason. What could be funnier than having the two together? But if you're jealous of Polovodov, I've told you once and for all...."

"Very well," Privalov promised, "I won't—I won't say anything more. Do as you please. All I know is that I love you."

"It doesn't show particularly so far. You're obviously much more concerned with your own happiness than with mine. If ever you do anything for me, you really do it because it pleases you. You're a decided egoist if we come to that, because you don't seem to be able to reconcile yourself with such whims of mine as Khiona and Polovodov. All I want is for you to leave my friends alone—my falcon Salawat, that is, and Shaitan, my bear-cub, Teck and Batir, and, finally, Khiona and Polovodov. That isn't asking too much, is it?"

These little family squabbles were redeemed by minutes of undivided happiness, when Zosya appeared in an entirely different light. Privalov was certain that step by step he would remould her. To begin with, she had at all costs to be fenced off from the influence of such questionable characters as Polovodov, Khiona and Victor Bakharev, etc. He was sure this was feasible. Zosya's own occasional remorse served as assurance. The doctor

was of the same opinion; everything coarse in Zosya the girl would wear off in Zosya the woman, he said. She was pliable, after all, and had such good inclinations. Look at the zeal with which she accepted the Privalov flour mill, for instance, and proposed to open several vocational schools. Her father's practical turn of mind was also evident in her, and didn't Privalov himself often seek her advice when in difficulty?

"It makes me happy," the doctor told Privalov with tears in his eyes when he learned of the wedding, "that Zosya's choice fell on you. I could wish nothing better. Under your influence her failings will wear away. I'm deeply convinced of it, Sergei Alexandrovich."

The doctor thought Privalov somewhat weak-willed, but this shortcoming was redeemed by the man's sincerity, honesty and love of neighbour. He was just the kind of man Zosya needed to blunt the keen edges of her character, her innate spite and imperious disposition. Zosya said as much to the doctor in a fit of confidence, rued her failings and promised to turn over a new leaf on becoming *M-me* Privalova.

Lyakhovsky took the news of Zosya's coming marriage with astonishing calm. To say more, he took it with indifference. He had just recovered from his stroke and wandered about the spa on crutches. The ailment had wrought a change in him; his vitality, it seemed, was dampened.

"So you've decided to marry Privalov?" the old man asked pensively.

"Yes, Father."

"Well, is he a good man?"

"He seems to be. That's a strange question to ask, Father. You know him as well as I do."

"What does the doctor say?"

"Really, Father! That's another strange question. The doctor's wonderful and I've always respected him, but

in matters such as this—he isn't one of the family after all. It just isn't done, consulting outsiders in family matters."

"You're quite right—quite right. My head, you know, isn't quite what it was. I feel it myself. There's a screw loose, I suppose."

"Well, if you care to know, the doctor approves of my choice. He even cried from joy."

"Did he really?" Lyakhovsky mumbled, glancing at his daughter impassively. "Yes, yes. He worships you. Always did."

The old man treated Privalov with a kind of veiled irony, almost with enmity, though he did shed a tear and kiss him.

"Do you know, Sergei Alexandrovich, that you're taking my all—that you're taking my last?" he said sadly, sinking back into his armchair. "If I had been told this a month ago, I should never have believed it. Frankly, this sort of thing never entered my plans. One must be a father, the kind of father I've been to Zosya, to understand my somewhat unusual attitude. Yes, yes. But tell me: do you really love my Zosya?"

"Oh, yes."

"But of course! How could one fail to love her? I meant something else: do you hope to—are you sure you can make her happy, and be happy with her? Marriage is always a lottery, but sometimes it's advisable to take no chances. I believe you—that is, I want to believe you, but please forgive a father: I can't! It's beyond me. Have you spoken with the doctor? You have? He approves Zosya's choice because he is fond of you. I am fond of the doctor, too."

It was hard to make head or tail of this strange hodge-podge of phrases, and Privalov was quite taken aback, but the doctor came to his rescue. The doctor was a pearl. He listened with rare patience to Privalov's delirious

confessions of love! Like the true friend he was, he mediated in all their family misunderstandings and petty differences.

"If it hadn't been for the doctor, we should have quarrelled long ago," Zosya told Privalov. "How boring it must be to have to settle family squabbles in the gentle capacity of a friend."

The young people joked and laughed, and the doctor smiled his professional, bedside smile and rubbed his hands nervously. Lately he had been complaining of headaches and stayed in his hotel room for days.

Pani Marina and David displayed that special brand of family sympathy which disguises all inner thought and feeling. Privalov at least was far more comfortable in Lyakhovsky's company than in Pani Marina's. As for David, he was much too preoccupied with his own affairs. He had struck up an intimate friendship with Polovodov during the winter and was reputed to have lost considerable sums at various gaming-houses. A circle of card-players formed rapidly at the Laletin spa. Under Polovodov's guidance David spent his time in good cheer, like a regular representative of the *jeunesse dorée*.

Khiona was in raptures over the forthcoming wedding. She shed tears of joy several times daily and assured one and all that she had long since foreseen, even divined, the happy event. Sergei Alexandrovich was such a fine young man, and so rich, and Zosya of such astonishing beauty, that provident nature had obviously created them for one another.

"I've always believed in providence!" she exclaimed pathetically. "I knew the first day Sergei Alexandrovich arrived in Uzel that he was the man for Zosya."

Privalov lived in a bewitching fog of sweet dreams and anticipations. In all the hustle around him, among all the numerous faces, he saw no one but Zosya, the little queen who gave him boundless happiness. At times

he looked tremulously into her dark eyes, as though trying to glimpse the future. Zosya loved him, of course. But her love was different from that of other women. There was no trace of self-sacrifice, of submission, of surrender. No, her love was haughty, a love that conquered at a glance. Zosya was always the same, always the same little queen who demanded worship. Even her caresses, her words of love were high-mettled. The restraint with which she allowed him to caress her contained something quite out of the ordinary, distinguished her from all other women.

Sometimes Privalov mistrusted his bliss. It seemed to frighten him. It was so utterly boundless. It inspired him. It lifted him high into the clouds, taking away his breath. How had he lived without it before? But that wretched existence was behind him now. Ahead he saw a rosy future whose infinitude made him giddy. Did her haughty little head really think of him, of Privalov? And her wonderful eyes, that looked right into his soul? No, he was much too happy to analyze the present. He accepted it as a *fait accompli*, as the first page of the book of love that opened before him.

## II

After Nagibin brought word from town that the mansion was ready, a modest wedding ceremony was held in the village church of Garchiki. The doctor, Nagibin and Tyolkin acted as witnesses, and on the bride's side there was Khiona Zaplatina. Zosya was calm, though somewhat paler than usual; Privalov was depressed. He had never felt as distant from Zosya as he did the moment she attested her love for him to the priest. "She's so beautiful. She can't love me," he thought dejectedly, clasping her small, cold fingers in his hand. The newly-weds went to Uzel straight from the church. They were

expected at a modest family gathering by old Lyakhovsky, Pani Marina, *et al.* The old man was moved and blinked his eyes wretchedly when blessing his daughter. Pani Marina, on the other hand, remained her usual queenly self. Only such intimate friends of the family were present at the dinner as Polovodov, Victor Bakharev and Khiona Zaplatina. At ten they departed.

Polovodov came home some time after ten, and when taking off his coat in the hallway was handed a telegram received in his absence. Running his eyes over it, he groaned and flung himself into the nearest armchair. The news struck him like a thunderbolt, and for several minutes he sat with eyes closed. The message was from Uncle Oscar, informing him that they had won the case and that Nicolas Veryovkin was on the rocks.

"If I had received the telegram a few hours earlier," Polovodov moaned, clasping his head, "all *this* would never have come off."

His head was reeling. The blood pounded in his temples. The walls pressed in upon him, red and blue circles swam before his eyes, and he gnashed his teeth in helpless fury. He scarcely remembered how he dashed out into the open, how he jumped into a passing cab and drove to Nagornaya Street. He got out at the club and walked to the Privalov mansion. The soft woolly snow deadened the noise of his footsteps. His heart beat heavily in his chest as he arrived in the square before the mansion. The lights in the house were extinguished and the building loomed dark in the glinting flicker of the street-lamps.

"Oh, fool, fool, fool!" Polovodov groaned, hovering wolf-like under the windows of the Privalov mansion. Had he only received the message two hours earlier, he thought, he could still have prevented this stupid wedding arranged by himself.

Flaming anguish was scorching his chest. His mouth was dry. Snow-flakes got under the open collar of his coat. But he felt nothing save utter despair, which weighed on him like a cliff. It struck twelve. He had to go somewhere. But where? To his haunt, the "Magnet"? Unsteadily, lurching from side to side like a drunk, Polovodov trudged down Nagornaya Street. The lights in the houses were out; the friendless autumn night had swallowed up the town. He glimpsed only one light, and recognized Zaplatina's house.

A crotchety thought came to his feverish mind. He pulled the Zaplatins' bell. Victor Zaplatin was in bed, falling off to sleep, turning over the latest political news in his mind. Khiona, half undressed, was in the dining-room, sipping her jerez.

"Who the devil can that be?" she grumbled angrily on hearing the bell. "Matryona, don't let anyone in. This isn't a maternity ward to come barging in at any time of the night."

Matryona went to answer the door and came back with a visiting card. Khiona was electrified by the name she read on it.

"Came on foot, it seems," Matryona whispered, wiping her nose with her fist.

"Show him into the parlour and ask him to wait," Khiona said, putting her clothes straight before a mirror.

Naturally, the thought came to Khiona's mind that something had happened. She walked majestically into the parlour and stopped before her visitor, who rose hastily at her approach.

"Sorry to intrude at this hour," Polovodov apologized, looking at Khiona with bloodshot eyes. "I received an important telegram about an hour ago, extremely important. I wondered if you could take it to Zosya."

"By all means."

"It must be done now—this instant."



"You're out of your mind."

"Dear Khiona, I beg you. For heaven's sake—if you want I'll go down on my knees before you," Polovodov stammered desperately.

"Sit down, please," Khiona told her guest, who sank wearily into an armchair by the table.

"Every minute counts—every instant," Polovodov whispered thickly, wringing his hands.

"You surprise me. I couldn't do it even if you offered me a mountain of gold. There are times when another man's house is sacred."

Khiona's words cut Polovodov like a knife and he gnashed his teeth. The thought flashed through his mind to run and set fire to the "sanctuary."

"May I ask you for a glass of water?" he uttered after a long pause.

"Wouldn't you like some wine?" Zaplatina said obligingly; the "snob" looked so miserable at the moment that something suggestive of compassion stirred in her breast.

"Wine?" Polovodov repeated vacantly. "Yes—yes, wine, if it's not too much trouble."

"Not at all. You're much too excited, and wine will calm you."

A fresh bottle of jerez appeared on the table some five minutes later and Polovodov swallowed the first glass in something of a daze.

"Excellent wine," he said, smacking his lips. "Yes, excellent."

"D'you really think so?" Khiona said with sham modesty, pouring herself a glass.

A brooding silence settled in Khiona's parlour. Polovodov tossed down glass after glass and showed signs of intoxication; red spots appeared on his cheeks.

"So you think it's all over?" he muttered thickly, fixing his dull eyes on the hostess.

"It is."

"D'you know what I'm talking about?"

"Yes. If you had received the telegram several hours earlier—well, brides sometimes faint before the ceremony, and the wedding is postponed—or altogether called off."

"Who could have suspected that things would turn out the way they did?" Polovodov addressed Khiona as though she was in command of the facts. "And now—see here, Khiona, tell me one thing for heaven's sake. You're an experienced woman. Yes. Does Zosya really love Privalov?"

"That's a funny question," Khiona grinned. "As if anyone made her marry Privalov?"

"Let's suppose that there were certain circumstances that could have influenced the girl's choice in Privalov's favour."

"You know better, of course. Lyakhovsky's affairs are in disorder. And there was this lawsuit on top of that. Naturally, Zosya had no other choice but to marry Privalov and thereby save her father."

"It seems you know everything!"

"Almost. I suppose the telegram is from Petersburg with word that Veryovkin lost the case."

Polovodov stared in surprise at his hostess, then remarked pensively:

"You're an extraordinary woman. We'll still be of use to one another."

### III

Old Bakharev's affairs at the mines improved as rapidly as they can only in the gold-mining business. During spring and summer he made a bag of money and his funds in Uzel rose again. His debts were paid, the mortgages redeemed. Its former prosperity returned to

the old Bakharev home, whose bright windows blinked cheerfully and contentedly on to Nagornaya Street.

During the spring and summer Marya Stepanovna and Vera were alone in the house, with Victor appearing in it on and off like a shooting star. Returning opulence brought back Vera's carefree laughter; Marya had changed, grown thinner, sterner, even more unapproachable. She was one of those old sectarians who stood no truck but her usual convictions and viewpoints. Her daughter's elopement only confirmed her faith in the sectarian ideals upheld by the Privalovs and Gulyayevs. She remained outwardly unruffled by her daughter's behaviour, because the blame for it fell upon Vasily, her husband, who had caused all the innovations in their home and brought the girl to ruin with his own hands. Nadine's elopement was God's way of punishing them, and it remained for her to submit to it.

Nadine's name was no longer mentioned in the Bakharev household, as though it were the plague. They had stricken her out once and for all from among the living. Only in the chapel, Dosifeya knelt devoutly on the motley rug and prayed for Nadine, while in Marya's prayers her daughter's name was implied under the general heading of "the suffering, the halt, the enthralled, etc." Hers was a typical sectarian prayer, brimming with egoism and hypocrisy, and devoid of its former warmth. In the summer they had had two letters from Nadine, which were thrown unopened into the fire. Marya religiously fumigated everything down to the table, on which they had lain, with her incense-burner. Dosifeya's heart bled for the girl, whom she had nursed and raised, but she did not dare to declare her sympathy openly. Vera thought of her sister impersonally, which was entirely unnatural for so young a girl. But she was only copying her mother.

Just one person in the whole house mourned for the young miss with all his heart, and that, of course, was

Luka, the old servitor, who shed many a tear for her on the sly in his little cubby-hole. "No escaping fate," the old man comforted himself, pondering over the misfortunes of the eldest miss. "No escaping fate. No, it'll hunt you up and trample on you if it's written in the book."

The news of Privalov's marriage was received by the Bakharevs in icy silence. But when Privalov called on Marya she could contain herself no longer and burst out:

"Marry an infidel, eh?"

"No, not an infidel," Privalov retorted. "My bride is a Catholic."

"That's all one to me. Are you turning Catholic too?"

She listened indifferently to Privalov's explanations of religious tolerance; her eyes were fixed upon him testily all the time and when he wound up, she said:

"Did you ever give it a thought, Sergei, that the house in which you live with your infidel was built by Pavel Privalov? He'll turn in his grave when your infidel observes her Latin faith in his house. He did not mean his house for that! Couldn't you have chosen someone else?"

"You've probably heard what my father used to do in that house, how much human blood was spilt there, what crimes were committed in it? They did my mother in. The old faith didn't save her."

"Don't judge your father. We have no business judging him."

"Yet you judge my bride in advance, though she has done no one any harm."

"If she hasn't so far, she will. Mark my words! Okh, Sergei, you've done wrong!"

No word of Privalov's wedding was sent to old Bakharev. He returned by the first winter snow, in mid-November, rested, robust and vigorous, having shaken off all his ills. Luka burst into bitter tears on seeing him.

"Why do you cry?" Bakharev asked with a sense of foreboding.

"From joy, master—from joy," Luka whispered, wiping the tears with his sleeve. "We've waited and waited for you."

"Well, and what else is the matter?" Bakharev asked impatiently.

"It's Sergei, master. He's married."

"Married? To whom?"

"They've twisted him round their little finger! All because of his good heart. They've put that infernal Polish girl in his way. So he married her. The way I look at it she used magic on him. He came here to tell your wife; she spoke her mind to him, but he wouldn't listen. It's about a month since the wedding. They've rebuilt the old house—only there's talk that they aren't making out very well."

"Not making out?"

"The usual story, master. He's pulling one way, and she's pulling another. They come to words, and then Sergei eats humble pie. Yes, master, that's the way it is."

The news took all the cheer out of Bakharev's homecoming. His house seemed empty to him. It lacked its former warmth. At every step he felt the absence of his dearly loved daughter. At the mines his grief was blunted by activity, but here, at home, the old man was in a depressing void. Privalov's marriage was another bitter pill. The names of Nadine and Sergei had been linked somehow in his mind all these years, and his kind old heart bled in equal measure for both of them. He did not know for whom to mourn more—his lost daughter or Privalov.

In vain did he seek solace in his wife and Vera. He loved them dearly, would give his all for them, but they could not fill Nadine's place. He loved her too much, he had been much too intimately close to her, she had been

too much a part of all his feelings, of him, who was like an old stump which gives off young shoots in protest against slow decomposition. Whom could he now call in for a heart-to-heart talk? Whose advice could he now ask when he was in anguish?

Even the wealth that fell to his share in abundance failed to cheer the old man, and he kept asking himself for whom he had tried so hard to accumulate it. It had come to mock his waning powers while he looked in vain for support and assistance. Alone in his study, Vasily Bakharev's thoughts went back involuntarily to the day when Nadine was on her knees before him and he had turned her away. Could he have done otherwise? He was the father, and he had to be the first to chastise his errant daughter. At times doubt troubled his soul. Had he been just to her, he asked himself? But everything seemed to speak in his favour. He did not feel guilty of having done her wrong, or of having been cruel to her. He recalled all the circumstances of the horrible business over and over again, and each time arrived at the conclusion that his Nadine, Nadine alone, was to blame. The voice of doubt and compassion bowed each time before the gravity of his daughter's crime.

One day Vasily Bakharev was in the chapel. The thick wax candles burned with a dim red flame; the dense smoke of incense bit the eyes; the monotonous incantations of the sectarian prayer induced an oppressive drowsiness. The ancient Gulyayev and Privalov icons gazed even more sternly from the image-cases. Something seemed to snap in him. He turned his head to the corner where Nadine always said her prayers. It was empty. An inexorable, deadly grief took hold of him, and he fell heavily to the floor, sobbing. The lump of ice in his breast seemed to melt, and the thought came to him vividly, painfully, that he, an old man living his last, standing at death's door, had turned his back upon his daughter,

instead of forgiving her. "Father, Father, this doesn't harm anyone but you!" the old man heard his daughter's cry as she sobbed at his feet like a mortally wounded bird.

#### IV

The honeymoon passed, leaving behind those cloudlets of thunder that never fail to go into the making of marital companionship.

Life in the renovated Privalov mansion gushed in a precipitous, choppy surge, revealing many of the things Privalov had not noticed before. The house itself was divided, the Lyakhovskys occupying their former premises, and the Privalovs moving into the new. Only the gala chambers and the hallway were in common use. Yet there were altogether too many rooms for a mere two families. To begin with, two circumstances stood out in Privalov's mind in bold relief: he had hoped the noisy evenings, festive dinners and gala receptions would come to an end with the honeymoon, during which all of Uzel was entertained in his house. He had hoped that they—Zosya and he—would then be launched upon the quiet family life they had so recently dreamed about. But nothing of the kind happened. The honeymoon passed, but the same sound and fury intruded upon his peace of mind. The house was full of guests and each day new forms of entertainment were invented, so that in the end Privalov also felt a guest in his own home, or even less than a guest—a stranger who had joined this merry throng only by mere accident. This existence had never entered his plans. He was apprehensive about the future.

Zosya naturally sensed her husband's train of thought but pretended not to notice it. Whenever he broached the subject she only shrugged her shoulders and looked at

him in surprise, as she would at a raving lunatic. This was the first circumstance to cast its shadow upon the young couple. The thread that bound them snapped all by itself. It had never been strong, and Privalov gazed in terror at the round of pleasures reigning in his house and drawing him and his wife farther and farther apart. He marvelled at the discoveries which he made each day. What he had thought were extraneous traits of Zosya's nature turned out to be innate; when he sought to influence his wife his efforts only developed into scenes and family squabbles. It was all so disgustingly, agonizingly silly. For whose sake, and why, was Zosya tormenting him? He could not make her out at all and looked round wretchedly for an explanation. They had made only a few new acquaintances—two or three mining engineers, several intellectuals, and a young lawyer, a rising star in the business world. Zosya's old friends were all the same and had only moved from the Lyakhovsky half of the house to that of the Privalovs. Polovodov, Victor Bakharev, Lepyoshkin and Ivan Veryovkin made themselves perfectly at home under the hospitable Privalov roof. They denied themselves nothing and, it seemed to Privalov, treated him with the courteous irony of worldly gentlemen.

They were the sorest spot in Privalov's heart and he could not see what Zosya found in their indolent, pleasure-seeking company. One day, walking into Zosya's parlour, he was the involuntary witness of the following scene: Victor, cloaked in a rug, was posing as a prelate, Lepyoshkin enacted the archdeacon, while Polovodov, David, Ivan Veryovkin and the mining engineers personified the lower clergy. Zosya was convulsed with laughter.

"It's blasphemy, Zosya," Privalov observed, scandalized by the scene.

"No it isn't. It's just funny."



"I can't understand it," he said.

"As usual."

Whenever Zosya had a minute to spare from her guests, she spent it with her horses or falcons. Six-month-old Shaitan, the bear, had the run of the house and had become a regular nuisance. He chewed and ripped everything within reach, terrorized the dogs, made nightly raids on the larders and attics, and ended by attacking a passing huckstress in the street, whom he practically throttled. But the more mischief he made, the more attached Zosya grew to him. It seemed she could not live without him, and even put him up for the night in her own bedroom, where he chewed the footwear, ripped the clothes and played sad havoc. Only after Privalov, lashed into fury, threatened to poison Shaitan, did Zosya finally decide to part with her darling. She had a brick-lined hole made for him in the garden. Every day she sent him living hares, rabbits and puppies. She delighted in watching the bear chase them round the hole before disposing of them, but one day the sport almost ended in disaster: Victor Bakharev, blind drunk, fell into the bear's den, and only coachman Ilya's timely interference saved him from a sad fate. The horses and falcons consumed all Zosya's spare time. She saw her husband only in the evenings, when she was tired and capricious. Privalov's protests against her way of life were treated as personal insults. After two or three futile embroilments Privalov gave it up. Often he blamed himself for failing to isolate Zosya from her friends and gradually build up an entirely different life round her, with different people and, chiefly, different conceptions of pleasure and amusement. He could do no more than place his hopes in time. Perhaps Zosya would tire of this vacuous life in some spiritual crisis.

"There's still another ray of hope, Sergei Alexandrovich," said the doctor, who also seemed to have drifted

farther away from him. "Just as any other married woman, Zosya may have children. Then..."

Privalov's plight was more and more difficult with each passing hour. He was afraid of even becoming prejudiced against the doctor. His own mental state was much too tense. Spectres of fantasy mingled with reality and his feverish imagination pictured scenes one stranger than the other. Privalov tried to avoid the thought that Zosya loved him as little as he loved her. All he knew was that he had not found the family life he had dreamt of.

Soon he discovered another bitter truth. Everyone in the house was against him. It was all too evident. And should he ever manage in suitable circumstances to isolate his family life from extraneous influences, he was decidedly powerless to cope with evil influences within the home itself. What could he do, for example, when everything Zosya did was a paragon of virtue in her father's and mother's eyes? Whatever was done, if it was done by Zosya, was right. Was there anything that could be denied to such a young and beautiful woman? They all expressed surprise at Privalov, who nagged Zosya for the silliest trifles.

"If you don't turn over a new leaf, I wash my hands of all responsibility," Lyakhovsky said to his son-in-law. "You don't prize the treasure that has fallen into your hands. Yes! I don't mean to say that you're bad, but for heaven's sake never forget that your wife, like all rare plants, will not tolerate coercion."

"I'm doing my best, it seems," Privalov tried to justify himself.

"No, a thousand times no! You make no effort to understand Zosya's nature, to see its subtlety. A husband must—if he holds his family dear. Zosya gave her youth to you, with all its beauty. Everything else is up to you. You're so utterly selfish that you don't want to reconcile

yourself to all the childish fancies to which a young woman, particularly a beautiful woman like Zosya, has every right. I know life. Take my word for it, I say this as Father and man."

There was just one way out of the distressing situation. He had to cut Zosya off from the influence of her family, which meant turning the Lyakhovskys out of his house. But it was an impossible alternative. The enemy was pulling his ring tighter and tighter round Privalov. Zosya soon fell prey to the general trend and treated her husband with the same animosity. Everything in Privalov seemed to annoy her: his boots creaked; his jaws rose offensively when he ate; he never kept conversation alive at table, etc., etc. But most of all, Zosya was distressed that her husband had not the faintest idea of how to behave in company. He was shy beyond measure with newcomers, or simulated a nonchalance that he did not feel, or simply kept silent in the silliest possible way.

"Don't you see that you're making a laughing-stock of both yourself and me?" she nagged him.

"What am I to do, Zosya? It's no use, because I simply don't want to see all those people."

"Ah, so that's the way you feel about it!" Zosya raised her voice. "You want to keep me inside four walls, the way your precious ancestors did their wives, eh? But you forget, I'm not some Russian woman who'd bear like a dog whatever her husband did to her."

"Zosya, for heaven's sake!" Privalov appealed to her. "Think what you're saying. Am I really so much like my ancestors? Be fair."

"Now you say I'm not fair!"

Khiona quickly found her bearings in her new role and managed to take a good many things into her stringy hand. By the way, seeing that everyone in the house was against Privalov, she hastened to join the stronger party

and added her voice to the general chorus. She never missed an opportunity to make things awkward for him, to do him mischief, and even prick him where it hurt most. She did it to strike the general tenor and play up to Zosya. After she had made a special nuisance of herself one day, Privalov remarked curtly:

"You seem to forget that I'm master of this house. You behave so strangely and go so far at times that one fine day I shall have to take measures."

They were alone and Khiona asked bluffly, eyes askint: "What do you mean? Should I take this as a threat, or are you perhaps forbidding me your house?"

"Both, if you like!" Privalov shouted, struggling with a desire to bundle the woman out.

"Thank you, Sergei Alexandrovich," Khiona uttered in the same bold tone, making a curtsey. "A fine way of repaying me for the rendezvous I arranged for you and Antonida. Ha-ha-ha! Has it slipped your memory—the kissing that went on in your study? I've been discreet so far, and your wife has no inkling what a monster she has for a husband. *Merci!* Yes, indeed, I'm leaving your house at once and make no promise that your wife will not learn of your pretty goings-on before the day is out. Add Nadine Bakhareva to all this. . . . Oh, I'm quite certain that the poor girl fell prey to your lust, and that you abandoned her."

"Why—why, you . . ." Privalov spluttered.

But Khiona was out of the door, leaving Privalov to rage in solitude. She was glad that she had at last taught the millionaire a lesson, and had repaid the injustices she had suffered on his account. She had sacrificed so much for him, and this was how he rewarded her for all her trouble. If it had not been for Privalov, Agrippina Veryovkina would never have quarrelled with her. No, there was absolutely no truth, no justice, no gratitude in this world!

Khiona did not give up the Privalov home, of course, and appeared there cool as a cucumber the very next day. Privalov had no choice but to avoid the worthy lady, lest she would, on the one hand, throw Antonida and Nadine to the tender mercies of the town gossips, or, on the other, antagonize Zosya. In the event of exile Khiona would no doubt stop at nothing.

"How cruelly one misjudges people," she used to say sadly to Zosya. "I always thought Polovodov a dyed-in-the-wool snob; yet it turned out that he isn't. As for Sergei Alexandrovich, how much must we women sacrifice to the men, disgusting egoists that they are!"

## V

Some of the outhouses in the Privalov mansion had been turned into granaries. The chapel was remodelled into a barn, and part of the garden was used as a site for more wooden barns, also meant for corn. All this reconstruction was completed before the first snow, when Privalov's flour mill was to begin operating. In autumn, Privalov had visited the mill just once, and this briefly, to see how work was progressing there. Now that his home had turned into a hell, he thought of his flour mill and contemplated a trip there as soon as there was snow enough to travel by sleigh. On leaving the town behind he experienced a marked relief. The wide open spaces, the expanse of field and country were just what he needed to free him from the nightmare. He felt his spirits rise, and much of what had tormented him only the day before, now appeared absurd.

"We've been on tenterhooks," Nagibin complained. "Waiting for you. The mill's ready."

Soon they were all gathered at the mill—Nagibin, Tyolkin, Father Savyol and Ipat, who now lived in the country since there was absolutely nothing he could do in

town. Privalov's loyal servant was not particularly upset by this change, for his master had no more worth in his eyes after his marriage. "Aye," he would say, "he's lost—he's a lost man."

Within some two hours Privalov was informed of all the simple village news. The harvest, God be praised, was good. The oats were splendid, the millet and buckwheat mediocre. A woman was killed by lightning in Krasny Lug, and in Veretya disease had claimed much of the cattle, but they had held forty divine services and God was merciful. The Bashkirs had a fine harvest of wheat. The hay was not particularly good. The sun had scorched it on the elevations and all they mowed was in the swamps and lowlands.

The mill was completed. Tyolkin calculated that there was water enough in the pond to last all winter. It only remained to start the "establishment," which was done one frowning October morning. The water turned the massive wheel, which drove the gears, shafts and drums with their various transmission belts and devices. Everything was in perfect working order. Warm flour poured from under the millstone, filling the premises with its distinctive aroma. All of them tensely watched the machinery, which functioned perfectly.

"Congratulations!" Nagibin yelled. "Everything's in perfect shape—working like clockwork. May this be a happy hour!"

Tyolkin again described the machinery, giving instructions wherever necessary. His eyes were shining and his face was flushed. He was restraining himself, trying to conceal his sense of happy pride for this rolling, rumbling, roaring brain-child of his.

"We must congratulate the master," said Father Savyol, who had by then gathered much of the flour on his cassock. The rest of them, too, were well powdered with it.

After the official opening the gathering was invited to table. The better-dressed people were taken to Privalov's little cottage, while the muzhiks had their feast served in the mill-house. There were many of them, all good men who had put much work into constructing the flour mill—some hauling timber, others hauling stone, still others hauling the millstones, etc. After three glasses of vodka there was the same drunken racket at the mill, peppered with songs and stinging Russian swear-words, that accompanies every muzhik get-together. Perspiring red bearded faces clamoured round Privalov, gnarled hands snatched at his clothes, and he also drank vodka and experienced a sense of unusual well-being in this little drunken muzhik world. A special table had been set for the women who had built the dam. It resembled a poppy patch, with their colourful sarafans gleaming a cheerful red, blue and yellow in the sun. After a glass of vodka the poppy patch came to life, joining the general uproar. A harmonica sounded somewhere, and in another corner a home-made balalaika responded to it plaintively. Anisya, wife of the village bailiff, sang out in a high-pitched voice, and dozens of voices caught up the song. It rose in a dissonant, trembling wave, tearing into the open, reaching the village, where only the old women had remained behind, who sighed and crossed themselves as they listened to the way the commons were making merry.

Father Savyol had had his share of drink with the others, tried kissing Privalov on the lips, and pestered him with quotations from all the classics. Tyolkin was in his cups. They all were, except Nagibin, who "never took a drop of vodka." Then the dancing began, the floor shaking under the weight of the milling crowd; the women flung their hands up with piercing squeals, while

the inebriated muzhiks shuffled heavily on one spot, striking up a desperate tattoo with their heels.

"Widen the circle!" a red-headed muzhik screamed, prancing up and down in his shabby goatskin coat. "Ah, faster, faster."

When the merriment turned into general chaos and the mill looked more like a den, Privalov retired drunk to his cottage, swaying from side to side and seeing double.

Next morning he rose with a splitting headache and had only a vague idea of what had happened the day before.

"Had a good time, Sergei Alexandrovich?" Nagibin grinned.

"Quite."

"Want a cup of tea? It'll do you good. Father Savyol has been asking about you. He's still drunk. Can you hear the mill? It was started up at three."

His hang-over had made Privalov think it was his head, not the mill, that was rumbling so. Why had he had so much to drink the night before? But then he had to. The muzhiks would have taken offence. It hadn't been a drunken carousal really, when you came to think of it. There was good cause for it, as the muzhiks say. And to begin with, it was nothing like the wild bouts of the Uzel intelligentsia, which was continuously drunk.

Nagibin returned to the room. "Here's the tea. It helps after vodka. Ah, there comes Father Savyol."

"Peace to this house," Father Savyol yelled out under the window. "There's a mill milling in my head today. But I've had a nip for the sake of my stomach and all my other ailments!"

Privalov took quickly to rustic life, to which he had always been attracted. A good half of his time was occupied in trips with Nagibin to nearby villages and the smaller, local grain fairs, and the other half was entirely devoted to the mill. Work was in full swing. Hundreds of



carts arrived at the mill daily, unloading grain at the granaries. Stacks of white flour sacks stamped with the green trade mark, "Privalov Flour Mill," kept growing in the storehouse. Dozens and dozens of workers in the mill carried and carted grain, bustled near the grain driers and winnowing machines, and in the section where they weighed flour into sacks. Strings of empty carts clustered round Privalov's little cottage, where the muzhiks were paid for their services. Regular transports of flour to the storehouses at Privalov's Uzel mansion began a week later. Privalov had never felt as blithe before. All his Uzel troubles had slipped his mind and he sent Zosya daily accounts of his activities.

Zosya replied curtly. She wrote that she was lonesome and should have liked to be somewhere in the country. But she could not leave her parents. Privalov mistrusted her at first, until his wish to be happy got the better of him, and then he forgot the past, devoted as ever to his Zosya heart and soul. He even tried to blame himself for everything, just to protect his love. Zosya was a good girl. She loved him. He quit the mill at the first opportunity and went home to Uzel. But a new disappointment was in store for him there. Zosya met him coldly, almost with hate in her eyes. He could see, he could sense it in her churlish face, in her unusual irritability.

"I'd have done better not to come at all," Privalov said. "Why did you write what you didn't feel? I think we had better be friends at a distance than enemies at close quarters."

Zosya was taken aback. For several days afterwards she appeared friendlier. Then the old story started all over again. Privalov noted with surprise that Polovodov no longer visited them, and that Zosya had, to all appearances, totally forgotten him. She was in the midst of a new obsession. Six hours in the day she drove about town in her sleigh, and had Khiona come with her. She

drove the horse herself, and sometimes even harnessed it unaided.

The wheat trade was making brisk progress. Privalov disposed of several large consignments at a good profit, and had several substantial orders from various trading firms. His plans, he saw, were coming true earlier than he had anticipated. He was short of time and man-power. He had to do everything himself to put the business on a firm footing from the start. Much time was taken up by all kinds of solicitors and banks. One day, on entering the Uzel-Mokhov Bank he bumped unexpectedly into old Bakharev. Both showed signs of embarrassment and stopped tongue-tied, face to face.

"Well, how's your mill?" Bakharev asked finally, avoiding Privalov's eyes.

"Oh, all right. How long is it since you're back from the mines?"

"Quite a time—about a month. Oh, I'd almost forgotten: congratulations on your marriage."

It was a depressing scene. Privalov felt guilty for not having visited the old man all this time, although he could scarcely have been expected to call after his last scene with Marya Stepanovna Bakhareva.

## VI

Veryovkin's last letter arrived shortly before Privalov's wedding. In it Nicolas repeated what he had written earlier, giving voice to all sorts of brilliant ideas and expectations. But he was good and tired of Petersburg and yearned to be back in Uzel, in his own element. Preoccupied with his family affairs and the flour mill, Privalov had altogether forgotten about his solicitor, of whom he was reminded by the encounter with Bakharev at the bank. The very sight of the indomitable old man was a mute reproach. The old man had asked about the

Shatrov Mills, the trusteeship and Veryovkin's activities in Petersburg. Privalov could not in all conscience answer a single one of these questions and suffered from a sense of guilt for having allowed his private affairs to supersede his chief duty. Things were turning out stupidly, with the exception of the flour mill, which was doing very well. But even this solitary accomplishment was shed of half its sweetness, because there was no one to share it with.

Privalov had heard with half an ear that Vasily Bakharev had recovered his fortune. People said he had made hundreds of thousands of rubles in that single summer. His wealth reconquered his fame for him. People spoke with respect of old Bakharev, the man who made millions out of thin air. But there was no mention of Nadine, and Privalov only heard about her in passing from the doctor, who had visited the Shatrov Mills in autumn. Konstantin Bakharev had never been one to write letters, and Privalov was not at all surprised to receive no word from him for a full six months.

Then, one day, he found Konstantin's visiting card on his desk.

"Probably gone back to the mills already?" Privalov asked Palka.

"No, master, he's here to stay."

"Impossible!"

"He's at the 'Golden Anchor,' master, and asked me to let him know when you'll return. Shall I send him word?"

"No, no, don't bother. I'll go myself." Konstantin's unexpected coming bewildered Privalov; he sensed something was wrong and instantly packed off to the "Golden Anchor." Konstantin was in his room and greeted his boyhood friend with frigid derision.

"I've come to stay, Sergei Alexandrovich," Konstantin said after Privalov seated himself.

"What's all this? I can't make it out."

"Well, it's simple: I've got the sack from Polovodov."

"I don't understand..." Privalov stammered.

"Yet it's all very, very simple. While you were fussing about with that marriage of yours, Polovodov got himself appointed solicitor by the Creditors' Council. Why d'you look at me like that? Hasn't Veryovkin informed you?"

"The last letter I had from him came two months ago," Privalov explained.

"Well, my boy, much water has flown under the bridge since then. So you know nothing of the Creditors' Council, eh? I envy you your blissful ignorance. Well, I'll tell you: when Lyakhovsky resigned as trustee, Polovodov managed through someone in Petersburg to have your brother declare himself bankrupt, and there was noise about some payments..."

"But he's a half-wit!"

"That makes no difference. They declared him bankrupt and appointed a Creditors' Council. Polovodov was put in charge. It all happened very recently. And I was the first to get the sack. To put it in plain words, I was dismissed and some chap by the name of Pavel Kochnev, a relative of Polovodov's, was appointed manager in my stead. He's married to Spiegel—Agrippina Veryovkina's sister. Do you understand now?"

Privalov was struck dumb by the news. His head was in a turmoil. How had it all happened? What was all this about a Creditors' Council? Who was Kochnev, and where did the Spiegel sisters come in?

"What are we going to do now?" he asked, regaining his senses.

"I haven't the faintest idea what you'll do. As for me, I've been invited to the Otmetyshev Mills in Eastern Siberia," said Bakharev. "It's five thousand a year and a fifth of the shares."

"Well, by all means," Privalov replied pensively, staring into space. "I'm afraid I can do nothing like that."

"One thing, Sergei, that I can't grasp at all," Bakharov said, trying to speak mildly, "I can't understand why you didn't go to Petersburg in winter, when I asked you to go. Couldn't you go?"

Privalov paced up and down the room like a wounded beast; Konstantin's question had touched him on the raw.

"Does your father know about the Creditors' Council?" he asked.

"Yes, I've told him."

"Why? Have you made peace with him?"

"Well—how shall I put it? We never really quarrelled. There was no need to make peace. I just came to see my father—that was all. He's changed, you know."

"Did he fly into a passion when he learned about it?"

"No. He wept like a baby. He's getting old. He can't get over your losing the mills. Oh, yes, I almost forgot—my sister sends you her regards."

Privalov looked questioningly into Konstantin's eyes, and thought of Vera's angry face.

"Have you forgotten Nadine?"

"Oh yes, I'm sorry. Of course, well, how is she?"

"All right. She's moved to the mines with Loskutov. They're birds of a feather, you know. Both drifting about in idealistic spheres, and both thoroughly satisfied with each other."

"I heard your father wouldn't speak to Nadine?" Privalov asked to hide his distress; somewhere away deep in him his old, long forsaken love stirred painfully.

"Yes, it was a bad business," Konstantin confided. "Father would have been all right, I reckon, if not for Mother. She won't hear of any reconciliation. I tried to put in a good word, but the old lady is up in arms. Even

stamped her foot. I gave it up as a bad job. Let them make peace when they're good and ready. It's a wonder why people play the deuce over trifles. Mother isn't easily budged. She damned Nadine then. She's a regular fanatic. The old folks have changed, generally speaking—Father for the better, and Mother for the worse."

The two sat up long past midnight. Konstantin Bakhar-ev did not reproach Privalov, for he had no interest in the latter's present circumstances. He did not even ask him how he was making out. Such was his nature. He never interfered in other people's lives, just as he never confided his own intimate affairs to anyone. He was a man of business from tip to toe, and his indifference to Privalov's person did not in any way offend the latter. As for Privalov, he had no wish to tell Konstantin about his affairs because, first, the words stuck in his throat, and, second, he fought shy of disclosing his family secrets. He went through everything—both the good and the bad—all on his own, asking for no sympathy, no advice, no pity.

"Are you leaving soon?" Privalov asked in parting.

"Don't know yet. I might spend the winter here. I need a rest—not that I'm trying to reproach you; I really do need a bit of a rest."

"Look here, Sergei," Konstantin called out to Privalov as the latter was leaving, "why don't you ever drop in? I mean, why don't you call on Father?"

"I feel rather awkward."

"Well, as you like. You know better."

Privalov left the "Golden Anchor" in a fog. His head swam. Things around him seemed to have tumbled to dust, and there was nothing he could hang on to for support. He had to live with people who were total strangers, and rebuff those whom he loved and respected. Before returning home he wandered about the streets, hoping the fresh air would clear his head. His thoughts

were in a turmoil. Life was a burden, and the realization that he was doing the very opposite of what he had intended turned and twisted in his heated brain like a snake.

## VII

Lyakhovsky to all appearances was quite well again. He walked about the rooms without crutches and spent hours in his study with his new manager. But that was only superficial: he was no longer the same. He knew it, and at times had fits of despair. He complained, he had sudden whims, and even wept like a child. Yet the very mention of the new firm "A. B. Putsillo-Malyakhinsky" seemed to put new life into him; his former energy returned and he taxed his flagging strength to break his enemy at any price. His efforts were pitiful, and he was well aware of it in his calmer moments, but could not shake off his *idée fixe*. Often he made absurd plans and insisted that they be instantly put into action. But after a day had passed, he would toss his plans into the fire.

The doctor saw Lyakhovsky's condition and did not delude himself with false hopes.

"You're quite well, of course," he told the old man at a propitious moment, "but we're all in God's hands. I'd advise you to put your affairs in order."

"What do you mean?"

"You know quite well what I mean. You have a daughter, and ought to make arrangements about her future."

"You're burying me alive, doctor!" Lyakhovsky raged. "Everything's done. The will is in Zosya's favour. I'm leaving everything I have to her. David is to get three hundred rubles a year. He must learn to shift for himself. Work is the best medicine for idlers such as he. Don't worry, I've done everything."

In confirmation he pulled a draft copy of his will out of the drawer and read it point by point to the doctor. The will was indeed in Zosya's favour, and the doctor was content.

"But I'm not going to die yet, doctor." Lyakhovsky smiled, putting the will back into the desk. "No, not yet. You know, sometimes a man lives on just for some all-consuming idea, and I have an idea of that kind. Yes!"

"What is it?"

"It's Putsillo-Malyakhinsky!" Lyakhovsky exclaimed. "I shan't die till I break him. I'm going to wear him down, I'm going to stalk him day and night, like a shadow. As soon as his business falls, I'll no longer vouch for myself; there'll be nothing more to live for. I've seen that happen. A sick man at death's door, absolutely on his last legs, it seemed, carrying on, creaking, doing the job of ten men, and then, crumbling into dust like a rotten stump as soon as his life's work was taken from him."

The day after he saw Konstantin, Privalov decided to have a frank talk with Lyakhovsky. The latter had been one of the trustees, and, furthermore, he was Zosya's father. He was entitled to know. Lyakhovsky was absorbed in his work when Privalov entered his study.

"I'd like to speak to you. It's very important," Privalov began.

"Oh, surely. Just one moment."

Lyakhovsky put aside his latest plan of action designed to ruin Putsillo-Malyakhinsky, and prepared to listen. He even extracted the cotton wool that he had lately been stuffing into his ears. Privalov informed him of the Creditors' Council and the new manager of the Shatrov Mills. Lyakhovsky heard him out attentively. His face grew longer and longer, and beads of perspiration appeared on his forehead.



"Well, I've told you everything I know," Privalov concluded. "Veryovkin has probably sent me a full account of the whole thing, but I haven't received it yet. It's probably lost."

Lyakhovsky looked mutely at Privalov over his spectacles, rubbed his forehead and drummed impatiently with his bony finger-tips on the arm of his chair.

"I can't make it out," he said hollowly. "Look here, do you think Veryovkin sold you out?"

Privalov opened his mouth to defend his solicitor when Lyakhovsky jumped to his feet, as though stung by a bee, raised his hands to his head and groaned miserably:

"Wait—I remember—I remember everything now. Here, in this very study—it all happened here. Oh, what a fool I am, fool, fool, fool! But how could I have known you were going to marry Zosya? Oh, if I had only known, if I had only known! Fool—fool that I am!"

"What are you talking about? I don't follow you."

"You don't? Well, you will in a minute. It's Polovodov's handiwork. I'm not really guilty—neither body nor soul. See here, don't ever trust Polovodov. It was he. It was he who let me down and who ruined you," Lyakhovsky fumed.

"I don't. . . ."

"Allow me. D'you remember how Veryovkin started the suit against the trusteeship? He was getting the better of me. A clever devil and absolutely brazen! Takes you by the throat, so to speak. Well, Polovodov took advantage of it and addled my wits. He scared the life out of me, just as if I were a child. Oh, what a fool I was! You see, a German came to Uzel, a certain Spiegel. You may have met him. He's some relation of Veryovkin's. What was his name? Karl—Friedrich."

"Yes, I met him. Uncle Oscar, wasn't it?"

"Yes, yes. The very same. A wretched figure of a man," Lyakhovsky continued. "Well, Polovodov brought him to this study, and the two of them twisted me round their little finger. Absolutely—just as if I were blindfolded."

Lyakhovsky told his son-in-law the story of his encounter with Spiegel and the outcome of their conference.

"To cut the story short, it's quite a dirty little affair," he concluded, pacing up and down his study.

"I'd like to know why didn't you tell me the whole story after I proposed to your daughter?" Privalov was pale as a sheet. "It seems to me there was then no longer any need to dig my grave."

"Ah, good heavens!" Lyakhovsky groaned. "Don't you know that one folly always leads to another—and to a third? I swear to you that I meant to tell you everything, every word, but again was led astray by Polovodov. I hadn't recovered from my stroke yet at the time, and he made me promise to keep silent. There was every reason to keep silent, you see. First, I didn't believe for a minute that Spiegel could do any harm. Second, at the time you proposed to Zosya the case was turning in your favour. Polovodov came specially to warn me. That was before your proposal. Yes, of course! He had the wind up, too, and had lost his head. Yet I should have told you, I should have been honest with you. And I would have, if I hadn't been ashamed. Please see my side of it: you propose to my daughter, she loves you, and suddenly I pour a bucket of cold water over your head. If anyone is to blame, it is I. And I must answer for it. I simply couldn't spoil Zosya's happiness. Besides, there was another reason why I didn't tell you." Lyakhovsky paused, and went on, "Suppose you had packed up and gone to Petersburg. Fine. But do you think you could have done anything? No, you couldn't. You'd have spoiled the whole thing, like a doctor who tries to treat his own ills. They must have had a strong group there if they managed to

pull the affair off. How cleverly they went about it, eh? It was genius, simply genius, to declare a half-wit bankrupt! And no one would ever have thought of it, I assure you, except that German. Oh, yes, it was he all right, from beginning to end. I recognize the beast by its claws."

"Why are you so sure that Spiegel, of all people, managed the affair?"

"Who else could it have been? He—it was he all right. I have no proof, but I'll stake my head on it—it was he. You know, businessmen have a nose for things like that. I didn't trust him to begin with. Then I forgot all about him, but now the whole thing is as clear as daylight. The German ruined us. That's something more than Putsillo-Malyakhinsky, believe me."

"I'd like to know one thing more," Privalov asked. "Do you think Zosya knew this story about Spiegel? She was always on good terms with Polovodov."

"No, I give you my word, she couldn't have known!" the old man vowed.

Privalov stumbled out of Lyakhovsky's study. He was not thinking of the Creditors' Council now, nor of Spiegel. A terrible picture of human baseness opened before his eyes. He saw everything now, down to the last detail. His marriage to Zosya had been wangled by none other than Polovodov. The monster had frightened Zosya with the prospect of her father's ruin on the one hand, and with the trusteeship litigation on the other. In other words, by sacrificing Zosya, Polovodov tried to save his own neck, well aware that Privalov would not go to court against his own father-in-law. It was all so plain, all so simple. There was one thing more that still disturbed him. Polovodov loved Zosya. That was self-evident. Also, Polovodov was unquestionably a penetrating, far-sighted individual. How did he fail to foresee his own triumph, how did he err by a mere month?

That night Lyakhovsky had his second stroke. Despite all the doctor's efforts, life was quickly leaving his body. An hour before his death he signalled for paper and pencil, and his weak hand convulsively scribbled just two words: "Putsillo-Malyakhinsky." His mind had evidently ceased to serve him just then, and the paralysis spread to the brain.

The house was in an uproar. All faces looked frightened and pale. Zosya was sobbing quietly at her dying father's bedside. In some unaccountable way Khiona happened to be on the scene, and no sooner had Lyakhovsky breathed his last than she searched every nook and corner of his study and rummaged through all the papers in his writing-desk.

"Look for the will," she hissed to Zosya, fussing about in the study like a trapped mouse.

"Later," Zosya whispered.

"No, no—now. It's very important!"

They looked for the will, opening all drawers, looking through every scrap of paper, and all they got for their troubles were the two drafts of the will which Lyakhovsky had read to the doctor. At the crack of dawn Khiona made the round of all the solicitors in town. But there was no will. Again she searched the study, and again in vain.

"You poor thing," she groaned, turning to Zosya. "Do you realize everything goes to David? You'll get nothing."

"Why nothing?"

"Because. Everything due to you under the law was given to you as dowry. Well, you can have all those dresses and things. Pfu! Indeed, live a hundred years, learn a hundred years, and die a fool!"

## VIII

After Lyakhovsky's death there was a kind of void in Privalov's mansion; everyone seemed to miss something. Privalov had disliked Lyakhovsky, but he was genuinely sorry for him. Under different circumstances this same Lyakhovsky was likely to have amounted to something greater. Man is given to forget the failings of the dead and remember their virtues—that is one of the finer traits of human nature. Privalov had no respect for Lyakhovsky as trustee and father-in-law, but he was fond of him as an extraordinary, clever individual. Time had never dragged in his company. There was a dry but unmistakably humorous note to everything he said. Particularly now, with David Lyakhovsky remaining for comparison, everyone suddenly became aware of old Lyakhovsky's worth, may he have been miserly, irascible, crotchety and perpetually ill.

His rights to the inheritance confirmed, David soon showed his mettle. To begin with, he quarrelled with Privalov and moved with Pani Marina into a house of his own, which he bought in Nagornaya Street. Old Palka naturally followed his young master, and his place in the Privalov ménage was filled by Ipat who was brought out from Garchiki. The loyal servant, dressed as he was in a livery, was as obtuse and indolent as ever and thought it his duty to be rude to everyone.

After her father's decease Zosya was overcome with grief. At first, Privalov thought it was not genuine, and attributed her anguish to her dashed hopes of coming into possession of Lyakhovsky's fortune, but as the days went by pity stirred in his heart for his wife, who wandered about the house pale and moody. Now that he and Zosya were alone in the house of his forefathers, his hopes were revived that she, free from the influence of

her former family environment, would turn over a new leaf. The doctor visited them daily and Privalov was always pleased to see this loyal friend.

"She'll change," the doctor kept repeating. "Her father's death is going to make her think. She's a splendid person—just apt to be impulsive."

"You're mistaken, doctor," Privalov argued. "She's anything but impulsive. She's sooner cold-hearted and calculating. She has her good points like all of us, but the root of the evil is in her inconsistency and her perpetual quest of excitement."

"Zosya is eccentric, but she has a kind heart," the doctor insisted.

"Perhaps she has. I sincerely hope that I'm wrong."

He viewed Khiona's growing influence over Zosya with the greatest apprehension. Nothing good could come of it. All Privalov's and the doctor's efforts to show Khiona the door were absolutely futile: Zosya would not live a day without her chaperone and came to life only in her presence. Zosya, in her turn, could not fail to note the great change in her husband. He had begun to treat her with the calm and diffidence of a stranger, a refined courtesy supplanting his recent love. She sensed that her husband did not love her any longer, that there was something that remained unsaid in his caresses, something suggestive of suppressed hostility. Privalov showed signs of boredom in her company and gladly withdrew to his study to rummage about in his papers.

"He wants to try you, precious," Khiona said. "But you mustn't give in. He treats you coldly, and you must be colder still. He turns his side to you, and you turn your back to him. Men are all the same; give them half a chance...."

"I don't care—let him," Zosya replied in a bored voice. "It's all the same to me."

"You know why he's angry, don't you, dearest?" Khiona kept on. "All men are as alike as two peas. I thought he was an ideal man, but I was wrong! As long as you were to get a big inheritance he was kind to you, but now that you have nothing he turns his nose away. Take my word for it!"

"Nonsense! He's simply stupid."

"You must pardon me, *mon ange*. I hesitated to tell you this before, but now I must confess that Sergei Alexandrovich is really a bit—how shall I put it—well, dense." (Khiona raised her finger to her forehead.) "You can't compare him to Polovodov, for instance. Ah, my precious, all our lives are nothing more than folly! Only recently I thought Polovodov a snob. Remember? But he isn't one at all. Not a bit of it. I made a ghastly mistake. He's no snob—and very clever."

Veryovkin returned from Petersburg by sleigh and gave his client a full account of his year's work. He made a colourful story of his dogged visits to the ministries, of how he held fast to various influential men who promised him their cooperation and help. Even a certain minister took an interest in the case. But Spiegel had managed to knock together a powerful party headed by names that carried weight. The German acted with diabolic cunning and, like water, seeped into all the desirable spheres.

"I would have broken Uncle," Veryovkin related, "but he managed to drag a certain lady into the affair. And the lady, I must say, has handled bigger things. To cut a long story short, she conveys cases through all the phases. She runs something of a ministry herself, damn her!"

"Lyakhovsky told me..." Privalov interrupted him.

"The old man went off his rocker towards the end. It would have cost him nothing to warn you in the summer about this lady. Then we should have managed things in

the best possible fashion. We'd have oiled her palm and won the case. I found out too late. And yet I did go to talk to her."

"Well?"

"Oh, nothing. She's really a clever little woman. About thirty, plumpish and has all the poise in the world. Briefly, she's the Balzac type of woman wielding great power over all the most excellent old men. She put it straight to me. 'Where have you been before?' she said. 'I can't help you now. Things done cannot be undone.' That's what she said, I give you my word. So I asked her, 'Isn't there any hope at all?' And she says, laughing, 'Why, by all means, where there's life there's hope.' An appetizing wench, damn her! She seems to know you."

"I don't remember. Not likely, though," Privalov replied.

"And do you know the advice she gave me in parting? 'Take a rest,' she said, 'and let all the others lie low for a time. In a year the Creditors' Council must make a report to the Court of Wards. You'll have them then. They're sure to overreach themselves!' How d'you like that! Ha-ha-ha! There's real politics in her head. She's a marvel! No wonder she handles million-ruble cases."

"All we can do is wait. Is that right?"

"Yes. We must wait. Patience. I hinted to her that if anything crops up we won't leave her out. She laughed."

"Shouldn't have done that, Nicolas. I didn't empower you to make shady offers, and I refuse to strike bargains of that kind. I'd rather lose all and be done with it."

"We're all mortal, my dear. Can't let the mills go to the dogs, can you? They'll skin us alive if we mince matters. No! Look things straight in the face: like cures like."

"No, I object," Privalov insisted.



"What a stupid oaf," Veryovkin thought to himself. "Wait, you'll change your tune when they get after you."

They could do nothing but wait and keep an eye on Polovodov's doings. But that was a difficult task, for they could not control the Creditors' Council directly, and had to look about for fitting excuses. Polovodov would turn in his first report the coming autumn, at the end of the industrial year.

## IX

The flour mill worked busily all winter. Privalov made frequent trips to Garchiki, but when the initial pressure of work subsided and he had more free time he did not know what to do with it. Staying at home, eye to eye with his wife, was not an inviting prospect. Every time he saw Zosya, a picture of Polovodov, who had contrived so artfully to join them in wedlock, appeared in his mind's eye. The blood rushed to his head at the thought that all this time he had been a wretched toy in the hands of these chandlers *sans peur et sans reproche*. Many times he was on the verge of telling his wife what he thought of her, but something restrained him. Better a lean peace than a fat quarrel. Furthermore, he did not wish to distress the doctor, who saw only the better facets of his pupil's nature.

To kill some of the time that began to hang on him heavily Privalov visited the Social Club, that is, the gaming-tables. Only recently this same Social Club was no more than a pot-house in his estimation, but now he was glad of even a pot-house where he could escape from himself. He got to know some of the club gamblers and, as always happens with beginners, found them to be quite a pleasant, even amusing, lot. And the game, for small stakes, just to pass time, was fairly engaging in

itself. To begin with, time flew unnoticed at Siberian whist, and it was six in the morning before ever you realized it.

At first Privalov had qualms about frequenting the club too often, but soon he overcame them. He knew all the people; they were all driven to the gaming-tables by one impulse—the vacuum and boredom of provincial life. Lawyers, engineers, gold-miners, merchants and intellectuals—they all mingled at the tables in a gaudy cluster moved by similar sentiments. The temptations of chance made them all equal, and, like all contagious diseases, admitted of no exceptions. It did not take Privalov long to acquaint himself with the club routine, which rolled along cheerfully in the little badly-lit rooms overcast with tobacco smoke. He soon learned all the minute features of his companions, their weak spots and idiosyncrasies. There were people who played for sheer lack of something to do. There were others who came to the club from time to time to drop their monthly salary. There were men who played with grave, forbidding mien, as though engaged in a ritual. There were wits among them, and drunkards, and men who were accepted with a feeling of condescension only when there was a shortage of partners. Finally, there were the professional gamblers, true experts, magicians, masters of the art.

"I wonder how things will go between Ivan Veryovkin and Lomtev," Privalov's partner, a member of the regional court, known at the club by the nickname of Themis, used to say every time. "Who will fleece who? It's diamond cut diamond!"

Ivan Veryovkin and Lomtev were the heroes of that winter season, daily locked in mortal combat. Previously they had always been allies, but there was bad blood between them just then for some reason, and they had both sworn to ruin the other. Privalov had heard in passing

that there was a woman behind their feud. Their card tournament was a centre of attraction, and whispered technical phrases, like war communiqués, travelled from lip to lip. "Veryovkin's going it blind. Lomtev's taking a flyer! Veryovkin's on the up-grade. Lomtev has taken a tumble!" There were days when Privalov waited impatiently for the night to see who of the two would tumble, and who would win. The stakes grew, and with them grew the public's attention.

"Veryovkin will fleece Lomtev," someone would say.

"I beg to differ. He hasn't grown to the job. Lomtev will tie him into knots!"

"Veryovkin's having a streak of luck this winter!"

"Don't count the chickens before they are hatched. He who loses first always wins in the end."

Everything was cut to measure, even the doorman, who reported to club habitués as he relieved them of their coats: "Lomtev and Pareny are making game of Veryovkin. They're in their thirty-sixth thousand."

"How much do people lose at the club during a winter?" Privalov asked him one day.

"That depends—the figure varies, Sergei Alexandrovich. An average of a hundred thousand, I'd say. Several years ago Pikulkin, the lawyer, lost forty thousand, and last year Kaloshin, the notary public, lost twenty, and Voblin, the bank accountant, thirty. This year Pareny is making a big haul—his winnings are up in the sixty thousands. Shelekhov is expected for Christmas. They say he's made bags of gold. After that they'll all go to the Irbit Fair."

Pareny—a shady character of unknown descent and an even more obscene occupation—was the rising star, the hero of the day. He was a middle-aged man of a distinctly military bearing. There was nothing out of the ordinary in his figure, face, behaviour and dress. The most ordinary of ordinary men, Dame Fortune was smil-

ing upon him. New winnings and new victims lay ahead. But little room was left to chance. Everyone knew perfectly well that David Lyakhovsky would lose about five thousand to the leading gamblers, Victor Bakharev just about as much, Lepyoshkin about ten thousand, and that Nicolas Veryovkin, back from Petersburg, would lose all he had to the last kopek. Among the possible chance victims were wayward scions of wealthy merchant families, lawyers who had picked up a stray sum, and an occasional embezzler from among the bank employees, etc. The lawyers and mining engineers enjoyed a high prestige, because both were a regular source of income for the confirmed old-time gamblers. They regularly brought all they had, all they contrived to snatch on the side with their grasping hands, to the gaming-tables.

"We get fleeced—fleeced good and proper," Nicolas Veryovkin would say, shaking his enormous head. "We're much like spongers or leeches ourselves. But no sooner do we suck someone dry than the gamblers are upon us—squeeze us out and pour cold water over us."

Privalov watched this extraordinary little world with the eager eye of a neophyte, and was drawn into it unconsciously. But his wagers remained small. They did not make much difference either way—win or lose. One day, when deeply engrossed in the mysteries of Siberian whist, a cautious whisper attracted his attention.

"Which one?" a voice asked.

"That one—with the small beard," another replied.

"Hm. Polovodov's a regular master mind, getting hold of the mills with one hand, and..."

Privalov did not hear the rest, but he felt the blood rush to his head; something snapped inside him.

"Does she," the second voice continued, "does she come to him?"

"No—not to his house. He's married. They meet at a

lady's house—you see her husband there, at the corner table.”

Instinctively, Privalov cast a glance at the corner, and saw Victor Zaplatin.

“How long has it been going on?” the whisper continued.

“Second month now. She's exquisite. Polovodov would never have won her, so he had her marry first, and then took her in hand.”

Privalov paled. He was afraid to turn and look at the whisperers behind his back, afraid like a man on the block awaiting the mortal blow. His knees shook and his lips trembled with fury. He saw red, he was ready to kill anyone in his way. Just then the rubber ended. He rose from the table and as he turned his eye met the glances of two respectable old men, who fell silent instantly. Privalov gave them a piercing look. They were total strangers, of the provincial middle class, judging by their costumes. His fury waned just as swiftly as it had risen; these innocent gossips were scarcely to blame for his being the victim of pitiless township rumour. His intimate life was no longer a secret. The dirty linen was thrown out into the street to be trampled upon by all passers-by.

## X

Privalov did not sleep a wink that night, suffering the anguish of one cruelly deceived. Could his Zosya, the Zosya he adored, have become his disgrace? In spite of all their squabbles he had trusted her implicitly. It had been a terrible mental shock to him to learn of her betrayal. Until then he could look anyone straight in the face. His family affairs had been strictly his own. But now. . . .

“Deceit, deceit!” Privalov moaned. “Why didn't Zosya say she doesn't love me? Why?”

Privalov wished fervently that he could escape from his thoughts. A man could go raving mad from a toothache. What would this mental anguish do to him? Total darkness had descended and life became an unbearable burden.

Through all this turmoil of interlacing emotion came the weak echo of a thought: "But what if all this is untrue—a mere rumour?"

"Of course, it's untrue," Privalov said aloud, hoping that the sound of his own voice would reassure him. "Zosya would never stoop to deceit."

But in an instant, a forest of ghastly phantoms arose in his mind's eye. Privalov reviewed minute details of his family life, things he had been unable to understand earlier. They loomed mercilessly significant in the light of his new knowledge. Lies, lies, lies all round! Lies in the sumptuous atmosphere of their home, lies in every fold of Zosya's dresses, in her every smile, in every glance. Now he knew the source of her hatred for him, with which she had vainly struggled at first. Polovodov had spun a web and caught her in it, and she would stop at nothing for him. She had nothing more to lose, nothing to look forward to. She had surrendered herself to the tide, and it was dragging her down relentlessly into the abyss. She might not have allowed Polovodov to possess her as yet. She was much too calculating and cold for that; but what was infinitely worse, she had resigned her soul to him. Privalov would have forgiven her, he would have pardoned her intimacy with Polovodov. But this was worse than mere intimacy. She no longer belonged to him, just as she no longer belonged to herself.

Towards morning Privalov fell into a stupor-like, restless sleep. His first thought on waking was to go at once to his wife and talk things over with her frankly, without putting it off. At that moment he heard Nicolas Veryovkin's voice:

"May I come in?"

"Yes, of course."

Veryovkin pushed himself through the door and edged up to the table. Privalov had vodka brought to his room. After the third glass Nicolas finally spoke up:

"I've come to say good-bye."

"Going away?"

"Yes, to the Irbit Fair—on business. There's going to be good company."

"How soon d'you expect to leave?" A sudden thought flashed through Privalov's head.

"Oh, in about a fortnight. Did you hear about my father?"

"Yes, I have."

"He's down to his last, and is also thinking of going to Irbit. Gamesters always go to fairs to recuperate, like the sick go to spas. Father trusts in the law of averages and hopes to recover. That rogue Lomtev plucked him clean, to the last feather."

Among other things, Veryovkin told him the latest Uzel news. Danila Shelekhov was in town, carousing with Lepyoshkin at the "Magnet." Polovodov, meanwhile, had faded out of sight, etc. Privalov listened with half an ear, and said to Nicolas in parting:

"I say, Nicolas, I'm thinking of going to the Irbit Fair myself. What about going together?"

"Excellent ideal! It'll do you good. The wheat bourse is tied up with the fair. You'll get to know some of the big wheat barons."

"Yes—yes, indeed. It'll really do me good," Privalov rejoined doubtfully.

"The late Lyakhovsky used to turn a pretty kopek at Irbit, and all on trifles—a shipment of hemp here, lard there, and before you knew it he got in a tidy harvest."

The trip to the fair was a happy idea. It was absolutely necessary for Privalov to change his environment and

shake himself free of all the phantoms that oppressed him. It was more than he could do to stay in Uzel. Furthermore, his trip would kill two birds with one stone. First, he was likely to close several profitable wheat transactions, and, second, the happy-go-lucky atmosphere at the fair would take his mind off his troubles. He changed his mind about speaking to Zosya. In the heat of the moment he was liable to say more than was good, and that would upset the apple-cart. He came to the conclusion that it was best to escape from Uzel, at least for a time.

A fortnight later Privalov and Veryovkin set out for the Irbit Fair.

Approaching Irbit, Privalov could sense the fair in the air. The road was badly worn, and their carriage pitched and tossed from pit to bump, much as a boat in the open sea. Travellers with high-strung nerves were seasick. He watched the endless procession of dray-carts heading to and from Irbit, the wide waggons of the merchants, and the roadway itself, which could not have been better ploughed if the job had been done with a plough and share, giving the impression that a regular army had just passed along it.

Irbit was ordinarily a large village. But at fair-time it was a kind of Babylon, attracting men of the most diverse countries, nations, tongues and religions. It was a turbulent sea which swallowed up anyone who ventured near it. A thirst for gain brought people together from all the four winds, and this mob of many tongues and tribes did excellently in understanding mutual interests, needs and requirements. The first bewildering impression was that a kind of giant wheel was dragging along tens of thousands of insane men, filling the air with a sickening caterwaul.

"My father's at the fair," Veryovkin warned as they drove up to a guest-house. "Must find him. It won't be



difficult. He and Lomtev couldn't be better known if they were a couple of white sparrows."

The three-ruble suite which Privalov occupied together with Veryovkin was, like all suites at the fair, distinguished by its wretched appointments, revolting smells and all-consuming filth, the filth that was an inalienable element of all Russian fairs. After a brief rest and a cup of tea Privalov and Veryovkin wandered off in different directions. Privalov meant to see the market, and then visit some of the corn barons. They were all on the move, and he had his hands full until night-fall, searching for the men he wanted to see. When he returned to his hotel, weary and out of sorts, with a blank mind and a ravenous appetite, Veryovkin was already back, and had brought Victor Bakharev.

"Well, well, who do I see!" the latter exclaimed, embracing Privalov. "Didn't expect to meet you here."

"Nothing to gape at, my boy. I came on business," Privalov observed, half in joke and half seriously. "But what's brought *you*?"

"Me? Ha-ha-ha! I was brought—well, I came on the wings of love, or, to put it less poetically, I came with Ivan Veryovkin. Yes, indeed. He's here, and his stocks are rising. He's playing the third night running and the lucre is over the twenty-thousand mark."

"Did you come to keep his accounts?" Veryovkin remarked lazily.

"Didn't I tell you? I came on the wings of love."

"Does that mean Katya Kolpakova, by any chance?" Veryovkin asked.

"It might. She's been playing cat and mouse with me for the past six months," Victor Bakharev replied.

The conversation naturally proceeded with the inevitable seasoning of drink and typical Russian *hors-d'oeuvres*—*balik*, caviare, pickled cucumbers, etc. Veryov-

kin's face was turning redder and redder. Victor Bakharev blinked his eyes stupidly.

"Where are they playing tonight?" Victor asked. "At Mukhin's?"

Veryovkin shrugged his shoulders.

"You do know!" Victor snapped. "And I do, too."

"Good for you—if you do."

"Yes. And your father's playing me foul, too. I know all about it. He wants to snatch Katya from me. But he's trying his tricks on the wrong man, d'you hear? I'll show her!"

"Oh, so that's it! Well, that's only half bad. Katya is a first-class wench in all respects, but you mustn't fret and fume over her. She isn't worth it. Take my word for it," Nicolas advised.

"Worth it or not, it's my affair," Victor replied thickly, ruffling his hair. "I'll take it out of Katya's hide. I'll give it to her."

"Okh-o-kho! Are you in so deep then?" Veryovkin was in raptures. "Very well, we'll have a duel in the American style this very day: two steps, through a handkerchief. Ha-ha-ha! Can't you see the lady doesn't love Father—only his purse? A sad, but perfectly excusable oversight to make—even for the cleverest of men who make a living with their brains, instead of their legs. Get it? What d'you expect Katya to make out of you if you haven't a kopek to your name? Don't you think she wants her share of the lucre at the fair?"

Privalov's head ached. The subject was inexhaustible: profit, wine, women and cards. There was something suggestive of drink and depravity in the very air. A sense of grief gnawed at his heart. He had wanted to be swallowed up for a time by this bazaar, but it was far from easy. From the earliest hours of the morning, wherever he was, he saw nothing but devil-may-care revelry. Not a single transaction was consummated without vod-

ka, and Privalov could scarcely account for all he had had to drink that day. He had even been eager to drink. After each glass he had experienced a traitorous sensation of relief, which goaded him on to the next cup. He knew this sensation from Garchiki, where he had drunk vodka with Father Savyol, and the Uzel club, where he had drunk with his partners between rubbers.

"Where will you go tonight?" the tipsy Victor asked.

"To the 'Birzhevaya Hotel' or the local 'Magnet,' most likely," Veryovkin replied, chewing his *balik* with a blank face. "Must show Sergei Alexandrovich our Irbit Fair. It's a picture well worth seeing. At first glance all fairs are as alike as two drops of water, and Irbit, like old Nizhny-Novgorod, only sprinkled with snow. But they aren't the same at all. Mark my words. It's a curious little place, this Irbit, where Russian Europe and Russian Asia come face to face! I love hoary Siberia, the country of merchants. It hasn't seen feudal lords and serfdom, and even the Russian *lapot* (the bast shoe) hasn't dared to cross the Urals. Siberia wears boots! As for the people, they're daredevils one and all."

Veryovkin managed to see Victor Bakharev out of the door under various pretexts.

"Why did you bundle him out?" Privalov asked.

"I don't know. God knows what he has on his mind; he may even make a scene if he sees Katya Kolpakova; it's time for us to go."

"Where?"

"Everywhere. The people hereabouts make a curious sight. To begin with, we'll go to the 'Birzhevaya,' and then to Katya's; my father is there, cleaning out someone the third night running. He's strong as an oak; once he's off to a start he can keep it up for five nights without a wink of sleep—and sometimes a whole week. And should he win, he spends the second week making merry. Have you heard about the joke Danila

Shelekhov and Lepyoshkin played the other day? Ha-ha! Danila climbed into a hotel aquarium full of sturgeon; said he wanted a swim. He did in the sturgeon, and footed the bill."

## XI

It was a frosty February night. The sky over Irbit was bathed in a myriad stars. The snow crunched crisply under the runners, the sound reminiscent of someone clasp-  
ing iron with hands numb from cold. The shops were closed, and the square and streets crowded with stalls, waggons and dray-carts. There was scarcely room enough for a carriage to pass through their maze. A roadway in the usual sense was non-existent. It was just a narrow, bumpy trough filled to the brim with trampled dirty-brown snow suggestive of unrefined sugar. Life and traffic went on all through the night. Endless waggons crept like disjointed sections of a monstrous fair-time worm. Coaches scurried in all directions, troikas sped by like the whirlwind, and suspicious shapes slunk in the shadows like jackals.

"The 'Birzhevaya'!" Veryovkin told the cabby when they stepped into the open. In the daytime the streets were crowded. Now the men were indoors. The turbulent wave had swept from the streets under hospitable roofs. Lights twinkled everywhere, and in the windows, through the tracery of frost, hovered indistinct human shapes, white clouds of steam burst out of opening doors, saturated with the mixed roar of the raging fair-time ocean. High-pitched music and snatches of loud, groggy song floated in the air.

Cabs crowded round the "Birzhevaya," and new ones kept bringing fresh customers. In the lobby the guest was enveloped by the usual stuffy eating-house atmosphere. The whiplash sound of billiard-balls came from somewhere near, and abrupt snatches of a wild fair-time

refrain rang out explosively. The hoarse, strained voices of the gleemaidens grated unpleasantly on the unaccustomed ear. There was, in a word, this typical fair-time pot-house air with its tawdry luxury and intemperate, wanton bacchanalia. Privalov longed to turn back, but Veryovkin had a firm hold on his arm and dragged him to the stairway.

"We'll have a look," he pleaded. "It's an ocean—a real honest-to-goodness ocean. Old Siberia with its hair down!"

"Wider, wider, o-ho-ho!" a besotted merchant screamed unsteadily, wedged in between two waiters.

"Shout—shout louder, brother," Veryovkin chuckled as he elbowed his way to a separate table through the dense mob crowding round the stage with the gleemaidens. "You'll swallow all of this our beloved fatherland."

The prima donna, a fat, flabby wench with a bird-like nose, sang in a husky, broken voice. The chorus followed, and everything moaned and groaned from the gaudy cacophony of whirling sound. A befuddled tradesman let out wild yells and squatted torpidly to the movements of the gopak.

The crowd at the tables was of every imaginable colour and description, a full-blooded Muscovite fraternizing with a Siberian, an Odessa businessman with an Arkhangelsk pomor, a Baltic baron with a Bokharan, a lobster-eyed Rumanian with a Chinese, etc. This grotesque drop of the fair-time sea represented in miniature all our many-tongued, many-tribed and motley fatherland. The North and South, East and West had their typical representatives here, mingling in a single, multicoloured mosaic. Englishmen, Germans, Frenchmen, Americans, Italians, Armenians and Jews, and that specifically fair-time type whose nationality is extremely hard to place, added to the diversity. There are people one can meet

only at fairs—mysterious strangers always immaculately dressed, sporting heavy watch-chains, massive seals and expensive rings. What they do and what brings them there is an enigma.

"This is the sixty-first time the Lord has brought me to the Irbit Fair," a God-fearing, silver-haired, handsome old merchant was saying, sipping tea with a suspicious-looking individual of the shabby aristocratic type. "The fair's picking up. It's beginning to attract more people!"

At first Privalov was terrified by the garrulous mob. Then his interest was fanned. It was an open page of typically Russian life, a pulsating ganglion of the vital interests of millions of toilers, at whose expense the ever ravenous beasts of prey he saw here were having their fling, oblivious of everything but their personal gain and pleasure. Looking at their contented faces, the typical signboard of profitably invested capital, there seemed no longer to be any doubt as to "who lived happily and freely in the land of Rus."\* It was a macabre force, foaming and seething, like water in a steam-boiler about to burst out of its confinement as hot steam and turn millions of wheels, drums, gears, and move thousands of intricate transmission lines.

"Ah, our two saints!" Veryovkin shouted, cutting into Privalov's thoughts.

"Who?"

"Lepyoshkin and Danila Shelekhov—the proverbial birds of a feather. Couldn't pick a better pair. Ha-ha-ha!"

Lepyoshkin and Danila wandered about the hall arm-in-arm, like two brothers. They were in their element, looking for a chance to do mischief.

\* The words of a poem by Nekrasov, in which the poet questions the existence of men who were happy in the Russia of the tsars.—*Tr.*

"Nicolas, blast you!" Lepyoshkin shouted on sighting Veryovkin. "What brings you here? And Privalov! Ha-ha-ha! Woe unto us!"

Danila rolled up, his short arms spread in a gesture of welcome, his swarthy face shining and eyes bleary. He kissed Privalov.

"Having a good time?" Privalov asked the two friends.

"Couldn't be better." Lepyoshkin sighed, his belly heaving. "Just look round you, what a mass we're celebrating here. It's a regular inferno. And all kith and kin—all merchants!"

"Well, my saints, what miracles have you been up to? How are you passing your time?" Veryovkin inquired.

"How? Same old story, Nicolas. Danila caught two gleemaids by the legs—lifted them like a couple of hens. Ha-ha-ha! The crowd went mad. They tossed him as if he were a hero. Then we smashed the aquarium. We miss your father, Nicolas. If we only had him, we'd celebrate high mass in grand style. He's having a streak of luck—winning over thirty thousand!"

Champagne flowed in rivers. Everybody drank. Privalov felt unusually carefree. Yes, carefree. All his troubles seemed to vanish into thin air. He wanted to drink, drink and drink. The drunken Danila was hugging him and whispering hoarsely into his ear:

"Why don't you ever look us up?"

Privalov told him of his last visit to Marya Bakhareva's and of how he met Vasily Bakharev at the bank.

"Wrong—you're wrong," Danila wheezed, rolling his head. "They're cantankerous and bull-headed, but they love you, like their own flesh and blood. Take my word for it! They're crying over you. Old Vasily is losing sleep—and all through you. Yes. You're wrong to avoid them, Sergei. I swear. Didn't I coddle you as a tiny tot in your grandfather's day? And you love them too—the Bakha-

revs. I know. But you're a strange bird—and a doubting one."

As best he knew, Danila related all the latest news in the Bakharev household. Konstantin was still in Uzel and had made peace with the old man. At the mines, the gold was flowing in; they had struck it rich this time. Vera was a regular bride—needed a husband, lest Nadine's story repeated itself. Okh, Nadine was a fine girl—a charmer—with a head on her shoulders. As for her nature—it was smooth as silk. And yet she came a cropper, all for nothing. In winter Marya had had someone go to the mines to look up Loskutov and see how she was. They say she's had a child. The old lady was terribly worried. She may have disowned her in the heat of the moment, but Nadine's her own flesh and blood after all. Yet everything was quite all right—the baby and Nadine, both.

Privalov heard Danila out with a sunken head. The names Danila mentioned revived old memories of untasted bliss so remote from his present-day existence.

"Time we got moving on," Veryovkin said, rising from his chair.

"Where d'you want to go?" Lepyoshkin inquired of Nicolas.

"It's no place for you."

"You lie! The devil, you lie! Me and Danila—we'll come there soon enough—after a bit of fun here."

"Come, but don't bring Victor."

"All right, all right. We know. Regards to Katya. Oh, by the way, my sleigh is out at the door. Just yell out for Barchuk. He'll get you there in no time. He's a tiger with the horses, I tell you."

"Thanks, thanks."

Privalov and Veryovkin elbowed their way to the door through the besotted crowd. The hall was packed with



merchants carousing with the gleemaids. Obscenities, feminine squeals and drunken laughter filled the air.

Barchuk's famous troika drove up to the door. The sleigh was upholstered with Persian rugs. Barchuk, grey-haired, old, with a shaggy beard and thick eyebrows, hovered up in the dickey like a hawk.

"To Katya's!" Veryovkin ordered curtly.

Barchuk whooped giddily and the troika flew bird-like somewhere to the outskirts, flashing past the brisk business quarters. Privalov watched the troika with admiring eyes. The shaft-horse, an ambler, stretched low over the ground, threw its head back and flew like an arrow; the side-horses, curled snake-like into coils, swept the snow underfoot with their manes. The bells under the large, ornamented shaft-bow jingled exuberantly. At the door of a two-storey brightly-lit house Barchuk reined in abruptly with his iron hand. The troika stopped dead. The horses sat back on their haunches. A maid came running to answer the bell and took stock of the guests with a wary eye.

"It's all right," Veryovkin reassured her. "Who's upstairs?"

"A gentleman from Moscow and some Irkutsk merchants."

In a sumptuously appointed hall the guests were met by Katya herself. She was in a heavy velvet dress, a diamond butterfly sparkling in her golden hair.

"You don't know each other," Veryovkin began, introducing Privalov.

"So we meet at last," Katya uttered, looking at Privalov with gleaming eyes.

"Where's Father?" Veryovkin asked, peeping through the door-curtains into the room beyond.

Katya only nodded her pretty head and laughed good-naturedly. Privalov gazed at the *demi-mondaine*, trying to find something of her mother in her, of the modest old

lady with whom he had played cards at the Bakharevs'. As in a dream he recalled the little Katya who had often come to visit the Bakharevs when he was still a school-boy.

"Why d'you look at me like that?" the girl asked with a smile, quickly raising her large dark-grey eyes to meet his. "I think I saw you at the club."

"Yes, I saw you too."

A strained pause set in. Katya was obviously embarrassed. Privalov felt sudden pity for this beautiful girl, torn from her family, a victim of social intemperance. "She's human, just as human as all the others," Privalov thought, admiring her beauty in spite of himself. "No worse than we, driven to this by want." Katya caught his glance and straightened, a touch of pride appearing in her face, and gave him a brazen, challenging look.

In the next room the card game progressed with that air of festive austerity which only inveterate gamblers, gamblers by vocation, would lend to their play. Ivan Veryovkin, pale, eyes bloodshot and hair ruffled, sat in the foreground. He held the bank. His effeminate hands, in which the cards seemed to shuffle of their own accord, struck Privalov's eyes. The "gentleman from Moscow" stood facing him, easily identified as a retired officer of an elite regiment. But his handsome young face was seamed with the strain of sleepless nights and the trials and tribulations of an adventurer. Some five Irkutsk merchants were seated round the table, their bloated faces and inflamed eyes eloquent testimony of recent carousal. Wine and *hors-d'oeuvres* were served on two tables. Privalov's entrance passed unnoticed. The players were too absorbed in watching the leading performers—Ivan Veryovkin and the Moscow gentleman.

"Here, this way please," a shady character breathed obsequiously, appearing from nowhere by Privalov's side.

This latest specimen was a typical jackal in human clothing, of the kind you inevitably meet attending upon the person of every conspicuous gambler. He bowed in self-abasement at each word and smiled fawningly. After showing Privalov to a seat he slunk humbly back into a dark corner, where he drowsed on a wine-spattered chair.

The appointments in the room gave it the appearance of a boudoir—soft chairs and a divan, carpets and flowers. A pink lamp-shade hung low from the ceiling; on the wall were several nudes done in oils. Looking round this cosy nest, Privalov caught sight of a pair of legs, one unshod and the other clad in a boot, sticking out from under the divan.

"That's Ivan Mitrich," the jackal whispered reverently, catching Privalov's glance. "Resting in the arms of Morpheus the second day now. He was far gone."

The game went on as before in festive silence. Ivan Veryovkin held the bank, dealing cards left and right with sure flicks of the wrist. The Moscow gentleman watched his hands indifferently. His cards were being killed one after the other. The pile of gold and banknotes in front of old Veryovkin kept growing steadily.

"He's more than thirty-six thousand to the good," the merchants whispered.

Privalov made one wager, a second, and a third. He lost all three, laid down six hundred rubles, and edged away from the table. Ivan Veryovkin noticed him only then, and nodded to him with a sort of sickly smile; large beads of perspiration stood out on his brow, but his hands carried on just as impassively as before, the cards seeming to fall on the table all by themselves.

"They're over head and ears in the game!" Nicolas mumbled, edging away from the card-table nearer to the *hors-d'oeuvres*. "Father's having a streak of luck."

The gentleman from Moscow came up to the table for a drink; he gave Privalov and Veryovkin an empty stare,

poured himself a glass of wine, and, putting it back on the table, staggered out of the room.

"He's cooked—*finita la comedia*," Nicolas said, nodding his head at the door-curtain, which fell back in place again behind the Moscow gentleman.

"Is he cleaned out?"

"To the last kopek. All of twenty-five thousand. He's a Moscow card-sharp—comes to all the fairs to fleece the merchants. But this year he met more than his match in my father. It's all right, he'll still make good! There's a good many fools left to his share."

The game went on. The Moscow gentleman was supplanted by a tow-haired merchant with diamond cuff links. He won three times running and raised the stakes.

"You'll burn your fingers, Vanya," his swarthy, slant-eyed merchant companion warned him.

But the diamond cuff links won again, wiped his face with a handkerchief and walked off to the *hors-d'oeuvres*. The slant-eyed one took his place and lost wager after wager; each time, pulling money out of his pocket, he slapped it down on the table with a thud and puffed laboriously. A loud voice and husky laughter sounded in the parlour. A minute later Danila's enormous head appeared in the doorway, followed by Katya arm-in-arm with Lepyoshkin.

"You should have seen it!" Lepyoshkin shouted, prodding Danila with his plump finger. "A labour of love, a regular lark! We stayed for a spell at the 'Birzhevaya' and made tracks for the 'Kazan.' It was swarming like maggots. We took a table, asked for something cold, and Danila says to me, 'Let's raise a laugh; I'll pretend I'm a lunatic, and you act my brother!' Then he screws up his eyes and lets out a howl. It made my blood curdle. I hung on to him and he kept trying to shin up the walls. Then a harlot caught his eye and he made after her, jumping from table to table, stamping on the dishes, over the heads

of the people there. 'Who's that? What's bitten him?' they shout, and I say he's my brother—a merchant from Semipalatinsk. Danila, meanwhile, climbed on the stage where the gleemaidens were, making short work of them. They screamed like mad, as if it were doomsday! A group of Tyumen merchants managed to lay hold of him in the end. Tied him hand and foot with napkins and dragged him to Barchuk's sleigh. I thanked them. Ha-ha-ha! Said I'd take him to the doctor. So here we are!"

"But a good half of the people must have known you," Nicolas chuckled.

"So they did! They were nearly dying with laughter over Danila's antics. Okh-kho-kho! Woe be unto our souls! That's the way it is, my dear Katya. Don't think we're old and decrepit; we'll get the better of any young un. I swear! Pity Ivan Veryovkin wasn't there, we'd have gone one further then."

Danila only grinned, wiping his bronzed face with a handkerchief. The Irkutsk merchants left the card-table and laughed with the others over his escapade. Lepyoshkin joined the gamesters, and turning his round, silver-haired cranium, shouted:

"Katya, I'll try your luck; all I win is yours."

"Better give me the money now. You'll lose it anyway," Katya replied.

"No, that won't do! Come, Ivan Veryovkin, deal!"

The game grew livelier, the wagers swelled, and Ivan Veryovkin's hands dealt faster and faster. Privalov also took part and soon recovered almost all the money he had lost. The tow-haired merchant sat by his side, raising the stakes recklessly. Lepyoshkin was having a streak of luck. Privalov began to lose again and also raised the stakes. He felt a sense of hostility towards Ivan Veryovkin and his nimble white hands.

The gambling grew more and more furious, just as though oil were being poured on a fire. Danila also

joined in the betting. The mound of gold at Veryovkin *père's* side was growing, and with it grew his partners' desire to win it back. Privalov entered into the spirit of it all, and was losing wager after wager, save for brief spells when small mounds of half-imperials also formed at his elbow. "His luck can't hold for ever," thought the drunken Privalov of Ivan Veryovkin, like all the others. A moment later he regretted losing the money so stupidly and promised himself to stop as soon as he won it back. But his loss kept growing, and Privalov smarted under the flaming desire to recover at least part of what he had lost to Veryovkin. Someone tugged lightly at his sleeve; he turned quickly and his eyes met Katya's. The girl called him mutely with an eloquent glance, and Privalov followed her into the parlour.

"I shan't let you play any more," she said softly, shutting the door.

"Why on earth?"

"You'll lose."

"Why does it have to be me? Why won't Ivan Veryovkin lose, d'you think?"

"Because," Katya replied curtly. "First, you're hot-headed, and second, Ivan Veryovkin always wins."

"But Lomtev got the better of him!"

"That's a horse of a different colour—a case of diamond cutting diamond."

This unasked for intervention first annoyed Privalov; he was on the point of giving Katya a piece of his mind. Then he suddenly thawed, and grinned sheepishly.

"You're right. I'm making a fool of myself," he uttered. "What's more, I'm drunk."

"We'll go driving soon; the wind will clear your head. Did you see how much Shnegas lost?"

"You mean the retired officer?"

"Yes, yes. He's lost his all—yet he's good at it. I'll send for the horses."

Privalov returned to the gaming room, where things were rising to fever pitch. Lepyoshkin was cursing loudly, and the other merchants joined him. Several rings and two gold watches lay among the imperials in Ivan Veryovkin's mound, and an expensive diamond pin lay desolately alongside.

"So you won't accept my promissory note?" Lepyoshkin shouted, banging his fists down on the table. "My note!"

"I can't," Veryovkin returned curtly, lowering his eyes.

"So that's the sort of thing you do to me, eh? Why, you snake! Why, I'll..." Lepyoshkin fumed.

But for Danila's timely intervention the crazed old man would have attacked Veryovkin across the table.

"Leave him alone, you fool," Danila wheezed, hugging his friend in an iron embrace. "That's not the thing to do."

"Why, I'll show him! Who does he think he is? Why, I'll... Let me go, for Christ's sake! Let me go, you devil."

"I won't. Calm down," Danila uttered firmly in his husky voice.

The episode brought the game to a close. Ivan Veryovkin threw the cards on the table and declared:

"I can't go on."

"Why didn't you trust my note?" Lepyoshkin approached him again. "I trust you, but you didn't. Why?"

Ivan Veryovkin took a handful of gold off the table with a smile and proffered it to Lepyoshkin.

"You can have as much as you like just now, but not during the play."

"But I don't want it now. Why didn't you give it then?" Lepyoshkin asked.

"It's not done, don't you know that?" Danila reproached his furious friend. "Impossible. That's all there is to it. That's the custom."

"Snakes, that's what you are," Lepyoshkin fumed on with pent-up fury.

The sound of troika bells rang out under the window. The company had a quick snack by the wine table and crowded out into the lobby. Katya was the last to come down in a blue sable-lined velvet coat. In the meantime, hampers with wine and *hors-d'oeuvres* were being piled into the troikas; in two of them they even put folding tables. The troikas were spacious—they could seat about a dozen people—and that sort of thing was a widespread practice. Barchuk's troika was occupied by Privalov, Ivan Veryovkin and Katya, Nicolas, Lepyoshkin and Danila.

"There's still room for more," Lepyoshkin mourned.

"I'll drive myself," Katya volunteered. "Let me have the reins, Barchuk."

She climbed into the dickey and grasped the reins. The troika flew like the wind away from the town. A crazy race began, but Barchuk's troika was unbeatable. The horses were hand-picked. The other troikas soon fell back, diving in the pits like boats in a storm. It was a starry night, but the stars were growing wan and a whitish haze shut out the sky. The snow raised by the hooves coated them all with a covering of grey. Katya's blue coat turned white. The sable-fur hat she wore changed into something resembling a snow-ball, her young, flushed girlish face beaming from beneath it, eyes shining feverishly like two dark stars. The frosty air, far from refreshing Privalov, did the reverse: it intoxicated him, and everything reeled before his eyes—strips of snow, the pits and bumps, a forest of trees, Lepyoshkin's visage, Barchuk's bent back, hawk-like, and waves of golden hair breaking loose from under Katya's sable-fur hat. Forward! At breath-taking speed so that sparks flew out of one's eyes! Barchuk took the reins from Katya's hands, whooped like mad, and a blinding cloud of snow-dust, which cut the face painfully, blotted out the rest of the world. The horses in front were invisible through the whiteness, and



it seemed the troika was speeding on wings in snow-laden space, like an arrow released by a powerful hand.

Privalov's impressions of what happened then mixed into a grotesque mosaic, as though he were being carried by a whirlwind. The troikas finally came together, and people all drank again. Topsy women appeared, and they poured wine over them. Then they galloped back to town, and Privalov even drove Barchuk's troika for a time. But it was all like a dream or a fog. In a large house where there was music and very many women, they all danced, and Lepyoshkin and Danila performed the gopak. Then they gathered in a big room, drinking and singing. Privalov was dizzy, and noted that Nicolas Veryovkin hovered constantly by his side like a nursemaid.

"The tables—put the tables together!" drunken voices yelled out.

An improvised stage was rigged up and staggering, drink-laden men surrounded it on all sides. Then Privalov saw Veryovkin carry a white object out of the adjacent room and place it on the platform. The gathering howled wildly, like a pack of hungry wolves on sighting a chunk of fresh meat. On the stage, in her chemise, stood Katya Kolpakova. She was singing something gay and dancing the cancan. The gathering roared and applauded loudly. Privalov also clapped his hands and yelled together with the others, and wished ardently that he could thrash old Veryovkin.

Then the picture faded. Privalov only recalled that he was sitting very close to Katya, that she was laughing merrily and stroking his hair with her small white hands. When he woke up, it was still dark, and sleeping shapes of men sprawled on the floor amidst broken pieces of furniture and empty bottles. Privalov himself was stretched out on a sofa, and alongside lay Nicolas Veryovkin, soundly asleep. Privalov's head was splitting, he was thirsty and something was burning in his chest. He re-

membered hazily where he was and what happened, and then sank back into a deep, heavy slumber. When he awoke the second time, the same figures sat and sprawled on the floor, drinking again.

"Time to go to the theatre, Sergei Alexandrovich!" someone called to him. "Get up!"

"What theatre—where?"

"Why, it's past nine in the evening. Ha-ha-ha!" roared Veryovkin, who had just washed himself.

That short winter day was crossed out, the approaching night serving as a continuation of the night before.

## XII

The theatre, put in trim haphazardly from logs and boards, was packed with a drunken fair-time audience. The box in which Privalov found himself was nearest to the stage. It commanded an excellent view of both the boards and the parterre. Privalov was particularly absorbed by the latter, the more so because the play was nearing its climax. At the moment he was alone in the box with young Veryovkin, the rest of their company having gone to the bar-room. Leaning on the balustrade Privalov scrutinized the rows of chairs. They contained everybody of importance for tens of thousands of versts around—bigwigs of the Moscow business world, Siberian industrialists and profiteers, vodka kings, wheat and lard wholesalers, fur merchants, drapers, etc. Each reeked of hundreds of thousands of rubles. There were several millionaires, mostly from Siberia.

"There's a picture for you!" Nicolas was saying, tossing his head in their direction. "Our bourgeoisie-to-be which will shake the pillars of our beloved fatherland in its own little way. There's power for you—terrific power!"

Veryovkin was still drunk with the liquor of the day before, and Privalov, too, was not quite well; he looked

about him with a kind of sluggish indifference, with the gaze of a stranger, an outsider. In his soul, deep down, a peculiar vacuum had formed, which did not even bother him. He only felt that he was part of this vast organism which churned below, in the parterre, like a monster with a thousand heads. This organism was incalculably large and attracted him with an irresistible force. It was the only possible form of carefree, untrammelled existence. Everything else had to play a passive role. Privalov did not even loathe it. It was a fact, a formidable fact, proper and legitimate just because it was there, just because it existed.

"Art is advancing..." a restrained whisper said in the adjoining box, making Privalov tremble. It was Polovodov's voice. "Yes, indeed, it's advancing in all spheres of human endeavour, on the strength of the basic principle of all progressive movement—a stern, consistent and inevitable process of differentiation. I said art was advancing, and that's true—our fathers, for instance, were mad about the ballet, and in our day it has declined. Take all that toe dancing, take the *tours de force*. It's all drilled in, all silly. Nothing more. They applauded all those *entrechats* in which Camargo made four beats, Fanny Elssler five, Taglioni six, Grisi and Sangalli seven. Then the music-hall singer appeared and the *entrechats* went to hell. Yes. That's the way I see progress."

David Lyakhovsky was in the box with Polovodov, taking in the latter's edifying discourse with attentive respect; he was now in that higher phase of his schooling which distinguishes the élite from the common mortal.

"Blast him for coming," Veryovkin muttered on seeing Polovodov.

Polovodov's presence at the theatre so excited Privalov that he felt drunk again. All that followed was shrouded in a kind of mist. He stared mechanically at the stage, where the actors looked like mere dolls, at the parterre,

and the boxes. Why? Why was he here? How to escape from this frightful perversion, from himself? He felt himself a wretched pawn—putty in a formidable hand.

After the play the rest of their drunken company crowded back into the box. Ivan Veryovkin's appearance created a visible impression on the audience. Hundreds of eyes turned upon this child of fortune, the subject of most fantastic fair-time stories. His highly typical entourage—Danila, Lepyoshkin and Nicolas Veryovkin—served to enhance the impression. All these men of wealth, and millionaires, were envying Ivan Veryovkin his short-lived popularity of fair-time hero. People looked up at him from their boxes and the parterre with rapturous awe, as at a victor. Even the merchants whom he had fleeced, shared this general sentiment, happy to have lost to him, and not to someone else.

"Father didn't even go to bed," Nicolas informed Privolov. "He worked while we slept. His winnings have topped eighty thousand. Yes. I advised him to stop, but he refuses, wants to strike the hundred thousand."

Nicolas mentioned several prominent names in the business world, who had that day paid heavily for the privilege of grappling with Ivan Veryovkin.

Meanwhile, the latter was the same as usual, smiling hesitantly and looking the typical old-time zealot.

"Katya is going to sing now," Nicolas warned Privolov, pointing to Mlle. Kolpakova's name in the programme. She was to sing a popular music-hall ditty.

"Victor Bakharev is here," Nicolas whispered to his father.

"Where?"

"In the first row, left."

"Curses! Why didn't you tell me before?" Ivan Veryovkin mumbled sheepishly. "Katya should have been warned."

"He only just came, and the curtain's going up."

Ivan Veryovkin shrugged his shoulders and turned his opera-glasses on the stalls to find Victor Bakharev. The curtain went up at that instant and an explosion of applause greeted Katya as she ran out on the stage. Dressed in the scanty garb of a French grisette, she curtsied archly. Lepyoshkin and Danila, not content with ordinary applause, stamped their feet ecstatically. An aristocratic clapping of gloved hands came from Polovodov's box. The conductor presented the songstress with a large bouquet of flowers, and, pressing it to her breast, the girl nodded gaily several times in the direction of Veryovkin's box.

"Okh, woe be unto our souls!" Lepyoshkin howled, waving his arms. "She's doing our hearts good!"

The conductor raised his baton. The violins screeched, and a horn grunted somewhere deep in the pit. Bending her body slightly forward, Katya sang the first couplet in a breezy style. Victor Bakharev eyed her hungrily as she gathered her skirts up fan-wise with a habitual gesture and started the cancan. Her plump calves were plainly visible amongst the crumpled pleats, and her knee was outlined in the pink tights. Lowering her eyes and pouting her lips childishly, Katya Kolpakova repeated the recitative of her piece, and when the audience madly clapped its approval she blew several kisses to Ivan Veryovkin.

"Okh-kh, *matushka*,"\* Lepyoshkin snorted, leaning his round belly against the balustrade.

At that instant a shot rang out in the first row, and a wisp of smoke curled desolately upwards. Claspings a hand to her left side, Katya doubled over pitifully hard by the prompter's booth, making vain efforts with her free hand to keep her balance. A wild uproar broke out in the front rows. Several men took a firm hold of a young man who offered no resistance.

\* *Matushka*—mother dear, a common Russian endearment.—*Tr.*

"It's Victor! Victor Bakharev!" someone shouted.

"In person," Lepyoshkin confirmed. "I saw him running to the musicians' pit and firing at her."

The curtain dropped. The police asked the audience to leave.

"Don't go," Nicolas Veryovkin said to Privalov. "I'm likely to have to defend the idiot. You might be a handy witness. Let's go backstage."

Backstage, Lepyoshkin and Danila were fussing about aimlessly, while Ivan Veryovkin was making dazed efforts to raise the unconscious girl. Rivulets of blood glimmered on the white bodice of her dress, spattering the booth and boards. A sleep-laden aged doctor was hustled in, and he murmured with shocking equanimity:

"Help me, gentlemen, to get the patient to the dressing-room."

Danila, Lepyoshkin, Ivan Veryovkin and several others willingly carried out the order, and even helped to unlace the corset. The doctor examined the wound, put his ear to the heart and said phlegmatically:

"Nothing to worry about. To begin with, we must see that she regains consciousness."

"Wait a minute more for the coroner," Veryovkin pleaded with Privalov.

Privalov stayed, and wandered to the far end of the stage to avoid Polovodov, who was hurrying to the dressing-room together with David. The small, shabby dressing-room now served as an annex to the theatrical stage, and the audience was just as hungrily crowding at its door to glimpse the death throes of the songstress as it had a few minutes ago relished the sight of her plump calves and shameless gestures.

Privalov had to wait almost an hour for the coroner. He perched on a pile of stage requisites stacked in the corner, watching the crowd fussing on the stage; someone was carrying a bucket of water, someone else rushed

past with a plateful of ice, and a third was hurrying by with lint. The doctor emerged from the dressing-room on several occasions and waved aside the shower of questions which rained upon him. The comedy of life had suddenly turned into drama. Flustered Danila ran out of the dressing-room and ambled along towards the stage. Privalov called to him, and the old man stopped in his tracks for a moment, recognized Privalov, and uttered huskily:

"Dying!"

"Who's dying?"

"Katya—she's dying!"

Danila shouted the words from the musicians' pit, into which he had jumped from the stage; he clambered hurriedly over the barrier and ran hatless across the empty parterre towards the exit.

Privalov went to the dressing-room, in which a deadly silence reigned. Katya lay on a bed improvised hastily from old stage sets. A mortal pallor had spread over her face, her chest heaved convulsively and she gasped hoarsely. Her burlesque costume was spattered with blood. A kind hand had covered her legs with her blue sable-lined coat. Ivan Veryovkin stood mutely by her side, pale as a sheet, tears trickling down his cheeks.

It was all over in five minutes. The woman, as strikingly beautiful as ever, lay on the stage sets in her theatrical costume, but now this soulless body could no longer be offended by anyone's eye. The bony hand of death had laid its stamp upon the reviling human orgy.

"Dead, your worship," a policeman whispered, letting the coroner into the dressing-room, as though afraid to wake someone.

The coroner questioned the accused and the witnesses. The scene of the crime was inspected, and so was the material evidence. Victor Bakharev replied to all the questions firmly and confidently, while the witnesses con-

tradicted themselves, and interrupted each other. Privalov was questioned along with the others and then again withdrew to the stage to wait for Nicolas Veryovkin.

"Sergei Alexandrovich, Sergei Alexandrovich!" Nicolas shouted, running out of the dressing-room some five minutes later.

"What's up?"

"Your brother's here!"

"What brother?"

"Why, Tit Privalov. The coroner's questioning him. Come quickly."

A pale-faced young man with burning Gypsy eyes stood before the coroner.

"Were you among the actors of the company?" the coroner asked.

"Yes. I played under the name of Valov," the young man replied with a foreign accent, tossing his slate-black hair.

"Fine. So your real name is Privalov?"

"Yes. Tit Privalov, one of the owners of the Shatrov Mills."

Veryovkin cornered the owner of the Shatrov Mills on the stage and again asked him who he was and where he had come from, and then introduced him to Sergei.

"Your brother—Sergei Alexandrovich Privalov."

The two brothers, tongue-tied, shook hands timidly.

"You have no other engagement, have you?" Nicolas asked the young man. "Come with us. We must get better acquainted."

"Gladly," Tit Privalov mumbled, "but I have no coat of my own."

"Then we'll have to send Sergei Alexandrovich home, and he'll send us his coat. We'll wait," Nicolas suggested.

"You might as well send a suit along, too," Tit Privalov said. "All I wear is the entrepreneur's."



"There's a monkey for you," Veryovkin thought, though he was quite accustomed to all the vicissitudes of life. "But we mustn't let him out of our sight, or he'll slip away. Not this time, my fine friend, we won't let go of you this time. Not for the world!"

Privalov took another look at his precious brother, who looked much like a waiter in a second-rate restaurant, and departed to his hotel suite, which had stood empty a full two days and nights. While they waited for the suit and coat, Veryovkin inquired into Tit Privalov's life story. It developed that Tit had run away from Tide-man's boarding-school two years before because the Swiss professor had made too frequent use of his learned rod. Then he joined an itinerant circus as an acrobat and wandered with it all over Europe. Later, he was a *valet de chambre*, until, by some lucky chance, he came to Western Russia, where he joined the actors' company. He had no clothes of his own, so the entrepreneur had been kind enough to give him his coat for the trip to Irbit, and from there he was hoping to reach Uzel in some way.

"Well, we might say that you've had a good schooling," Veryovkin uttered pensively. "Should have made your appearance some six months ago. What parts do you play on the stage?"

"Oh, different parts," Tit replied. "Mainly servants, and parts in the vaudeville."

"Hm. Yes, indeed, it's a regular vaudeville. The devil himself wouldn't have made head or tail of it."

### XIII

Privalov brought his brother to Uzel and installed him in the rooms formerly occupied by the Lyakhovskys. The young man rapidly got his bearings and for some time served as an object of rumour and gossip. Many regard-

ed him a victim of Privalov's hate saved by a lucky chance from total perdition. Even Katya Kolpakova's death was associated with the two brothers; the actress was said to have paid with her life for her too intimate relations with the heir to the Privalov fortune.

At home Sergei found everything just as he left it. In fact, he had not expected to find any change, because he had reliable information that Zosya still had her regular appointments with Polovodov at Zaplatina's. Tit Privalov served as Zosya's new plaything, first as an adventurer and, second, as the hero of Uzel gossip; she drove him about town in her carriage and was prepared to listen endlessly to his stories and anecdotes of Paris where he had had his primary education before going to Tide-man's. Khiona was also charmed by this amusing *Titus*, who spoke French like a Parisian and had a vast stock of daring witticisms, puns and *bons mots*.

"Yes, we're wasting our lives in this hole," Khiona sighed. "We'll die here without seeing a thing. Ah, Paris, Paris! That's where I'd like to go. Polovodov says the same thing—that he won't die in peace unless he visits Paris."

Privalov's flour mill was making fine progress, although the master's absence made itself felt notwithstanding old Nagibin's zeal. Privalov went to the mill, stayed there about a week, and returned to Uzel with the last snow. But both in Uzel and Garchiki he was no longer the old Privalov. He was an entirely different individual, hard to recognize, having taken to drink ever since the Irbit Fair. In Uzel he spent the nights at the club, where he played for big stakes in Ivan Veryovkin's company, who returned from the fair with empty pockets.

"How on earth did you lose?" Privalov asked him.

"Want of character, I suppose. I should have retired, but I wanted to top the hundred thousand. Lost everything. One time I even packed up and left, with more

than ninety thousand. They came along part of the way to see me off, and talked me into turning back. Some shark tied me into knots, cleaned me out to my bottom kopek. He had an amazing streak of luck, the rogue."

One night, when Privalov stayed at the club later than usual, Ivan Veryovkin took him aside, then said uncertainly:

"Katya's mother—poor woman. I'd have liked to look her up, perhaps help her, but it's kind of awkward for me. Now if you were to do it—you've met her at the Bakharevs', haven't you?"

"Yes. I suppose I'll go," Privalov agreed.

"Victor Bakharev wants you to, as well," Veryovkin added.

"Where's he now?"

"At his father's. On bail."

"Very well, I'll do it," Privalov promised.

Privalov was glad of the request. He had a sense of guilt for not having visited old Kolpakova all this time. He went to her the very next morning. Old Poluyanov met him in the yard amidst the Kolpakov ruins, smiled welcomingly and told him with a sly wink:

"My case is coming up in the next few days. I've already told Pavla Kolpakova. Here are the papers...."

Again the bundle of motley scraps appeared on the scene, tied neatly with a pink ribbon.

Pavla Kolpakova showed signs of surprise on seeing Privalov's tall frame in the hallway. She seemed to shrink into herself, and hastily straightened her old calico dress.

"Don't you recognize me?" Privalov asked.

"I do, but you frighten me, Sergei Alexandrovich. You look so much older—not at all your former self. Don't take it amiss, though, I just said what came to my mind."

"I dropped in to see how you are. It's been a long time since I saw you last."

"A long time, indeed," the woman sighed.

Pavla Kolpakova fussed about with her samovar, speaking with the visitor across the partition.

"It's forty days soon since my Katya was shot," Pavla Kolpakova said, reappearing in the room. "I'm holding commemoration services, and some time in summer I'll visit her grave. I was annoyed with her when she was alive, but now my heart bleeds! I feel quite bitter whenever I think of her. Yet I thank the Lord for having taken her from all the infamy and dishonour."

Her words shocked Privalov.

"You're being too hard on her," he observed.

"No, my boy, no. Look at the grief she brought down upon the Bakharevs. And if she had been alive she may have done even more harm. What's going to happen to Victor now? Okh-kh. D'you think Nicolas Veryovkin will save him? He won't. Marya Bakhareva has wept her eyes out over her children! I only had my Katya—just one cause of grief—while she has her troubles with all of them."

"By the way, do you know where Nadine is?" Privalov asked.

Pavla Kolpakova looked at him suspiciously, eyes narrowed.

"Hasn't the doctor told you?" she asked.

"I haven't seen him for over a month."

"Nadine is in Úzel. She's been here almost a fortnight. Yes."

"In Úzel?"

"D'you really mean that you don't know? She came here with that—well, with her husband, as people now say. He's ill, this husband of hers."

"Loskutov?"

"Yes. They're staying with the doctor."

"Does Marya Bakhareva know about it?" Privalov inquired.

"She does. But she won't talk about it."

The old woman waved her arm and burst into tears. She still had some in reserve for other people's grief.

"Nadine has come to see me," she said, wiping her eyes. "She has. She remembered me. Came to me as soon as she heard about Katya. Looks a bit older—a wondrously pretty girl—I mean, lady, to put it your way. I admired her and said something to her, and she blushed. Says her heart bleeds for her father. Asked me how things were at home. Asked about you, too—how you were; but I couldn't tell her, because I had no idea myself."

"It seems to me everybody knows how I am. It's no secret, I'm afraid. Can't hide an awl in a sack."

"Ah, dear Sergei, I refuse to believe the gossip," the old woman sighed. She shook her head and, looking askint at Privalov, added:

"Will you take offence if I say something?"

"No, no, not at all," Privalov replied hastily.

"I have no idea if it's true, but people say you drink and play cards. Be done with it, for heaven's sake!"

Privalov smiled.

"No, it's easier that way," he said, rising to his feet. "I'm sick of everything."

"Yes, I know, I know. That pagan, Zosya, is behind it all."

"No, I have no complaints about my wife. It's all my own fault."

They parted. The old woman, deeply touched, crossed Privalov, and when he hinted about the reason of his visit she waved her hands in refusal and said, smiling sadly:

"No. I need nothing. What would an old woman like me want—a kopek or two for a candle to our Lord. That's

all. Thank you for remembering me, and please think of what I told you about yourself."

*She* was here, in Uzel, thought Privalov on his way home from Pavla Kolpakova's. And he had not known! The doctor did not show up, seemingly avoiding all encounters. But that was his affair. A violent desire to see Nadine, at least from a distance, stirred in Privalov. Would she recognize him? Perhaps she would turn away from the drunkard and gambler that he now was, whom even the Lord had forsaken, as Pavla Kolpakova would have said?

"Ah, to die!" it occurred to Privalov. Yes, that would be best. To end all at a single stroke, to be free once and for all of all oppressive reminiscences and tribulations.

What was there to live for? Dragging out an existence from day to day like all the others was not worth the effort. He had even somehow lost interest in his cause. He recalled the Irbit Fair, where he had seen the sinister force at close range, with which he had wanted to grapple. His idea was like the death cry of a drowning man in the concerted, powerful chorus of selfish interests, pitiless exploitation, organized fraud and a kind of organic baseness.

Next day Privalov could not conquer the temptation of going to the street where the doctor lived. To begin with, he only wanted to look from afar at the house which sheltered Nadine, and meant then to return home. Perhaps her familiar face would flit by one of the windows.

It was not particularly difficult to find the doctor's domicile. It was on the other side of the pond, along the old Karmannaya Street, in a small new cottage facing the street with its four windows. The doctor's motley dog, a present from Zosya, lay at the door. Privalov walked with a beating heart along the wooden sidewalk, his eyes fixed upon the cherished abode. He drew level with the door, saw the green paws of the agaves in the windows, rang

the bell in spite of himself, wanted to turn and run, but the door creaked at that instant and he heard a familiar voice:

"Who's there?"

The door was flung open and Nadine herself, in a plain brown dress, a grey shawl on her shoulders, appeared in the doorway. She gave Privalov a cursory glance and was on the point of saying that the doctor was out, when she stopped and gasped, offering her hand with a smile.

"Sergei Alexandrovich! What a pleasant surprise! The doctor said you had gone to your mill directly after the fair."

"Yes, I had, and returned just a few days ago," Privalov replied.

"I'm awfully glad to see you," Nadine said hastily as Privalov was taking off his coat in the hallway. "Maxim's been asking about you. We've stopped at the doctor's for the time being. We thought we'd stay just a few days, but it's well on to the second week now. This way, Sergei Alexandrovich."

Privalov thought the little parlour enchanting, like paradise. He was afraid to look up at Nadine, as though the charm of their meeting would fade from this one glance.

"It's been so very, very long since we've seen each other," Nadine said, motioning her guest to the nearest armchair.

She appeared taller and plumper. But her face was the same, with a hint of austere beauty softened by the Bakharev smile. Her grey eyes looked milder and somewhat sadder, as if a shadow lurked in their depths. She behaved as simply and amiably as before, with a frankness which disarms all evil intent, all evil desires.

In a few brief minutes Nadine told him of the mine, where she had had a taste of complete happiness, marred only by an irresistible longing to see her parents. She

would have been perfectly happy but her husband's health worried her, in spite of what the doctor said. Like all doctors, he was trying to convince her that there was nothing to fear. Then she told Privalov of her father and mother, and of Konstantin, who left for the mills in Eastern Siberia.

"Didn't you see him before he left?" Nadine asked.

"No. No sense to it anyway," Privalov confessed. "We were brought together by the mills in a way, but now that final link has been torn."

To change the subject Nadine asked Privalov about his flour mill and the corn trade. She was so deeply interested in his undertaking, she said, although Konstantin would never tell her anything about it. Like her father, he had been against it from the start. Privalov, taking heart, gave her a detailed account of what he had done. He told her of the progress he had made, and of the failures and disappointments that came to the surface as he learned more about the business.

"It's a pity the doctor didn't tell us you were here," Nadine said. "He must have known, because he goes to your house every day. We're supposed to be leaving in a few days."

"I know why the doctor didn't tell you I had returned," Privalov said, lowering his eyes. "He was afraid that I might cut a sorry figure. He's a good man, and wanted to keep my vices from you—if only for a time."

"Sergei Alexandrovich! Your words frighten me," Nadine mumbled with wide-open eyes.

She threw a worried look at him, who was now staring at her querulously, grief and anguish written in his kind, striking face.

"It's a long story, Nadine. But if you care to listen, I'll tell you about it."

Privalov felt an overwhelming desire to confide in, no, confess to, this girl, her alone, no one else. All the



others would judge him superficially. She—she alone would understand. And let her kill him with her scorn—now, on the spot. It would be a relief.

“On my way here I didn’t think I’d see you,” Privalov said thickly, lowering his eyes again. “I was afraid of seeing you—though I wanted to very much. I’ll say more: on my way here I was thinking of death—my own. How good it is to die at the right time, Nadine, and how difficult to know that you’re still young, strong, and cannot count on it yet. I came to think of death after the tragic story of Katya Kolpakova. She died in my presence—and I envied her. She was a remarkably beautiful girl. In death she was a perfect beauty.”

Privalov told Nadine everything about the fatal scene in the garden, about his trip to the Irbit Fair and his visit to Pavla Kolpakova. He described the characters in his confusing story, his domestic environment and his gradual fall—rapid to all outer appearances but intrinsically consistent. It was extremely difficult to trace one’s fall oneself, that is, its various stages. It was just as difficult as estimating the height of a mountain while descending it. There was a lack of insight, of perspective, which would have made comparisons possible. Thoughts seemed to float in a vacuum, unable to strike on anything.

“Excuse me for speaking so much about myself,” Privalov concluded. “I haven’t spoken to anyone about it, and shan’t any more. I’ve met many people who plague their friends with their little troubles. It’s a boring and silly business. But hear me out. I’m desperate...”

Nadine contracted Privalov’s excitement. She felt herself turning cold. She wanted to get up and run. Something held her back, however, and she again listened to the strange confession—a thing she really had absolute-

ly no right to do. Why did he tell her, of all people, and why in this peculiar way?

"Note the lack of consistency," Privalov said. "Things happened in leaps and bounds. The picture has to be pieced together. I thought about it. I was always aware of it. It always tormented me. To understand one properly you've got to know everything about him—not just his own past, but all his inherited features. View the facts I have presented from that standpoint, and the picture is complete. You see a typical representative of a degenerate family; nothing can save him; not even the best of intentions. That, precisely, if I'm right, is what the doctor thinks about me."

Privalov told Nadine that his faith in his cause had been shaken. Since his personal life had failed he had turned to his idea in quest of some semblance of happiness, but now he doubted it.

"I disagree with you," Nadine said. "You're prejudiced against it."

Her eyes sparkled. A bright flush suffused her face. She tried to convince Privalov that he should not be disappointed in his idea. She repeated the arguments he had used on her at the Shatrov Mills. Privalov listened to her fervent, deep-felt speech with a mingling of surprise and dejection. Her father's practiciness had come alive in her. At the same time, she was carried away by the majestic picture of an unequal, desperate struggle with a numerically superior, far more resourceful adversary. It was a worth-while struggle, a struggle worth living for. It was a shame to give up at a point when the business had been put into operation and needed only to be developed.

"Frankly speaking, I expected more of you, Sergei Alexandrovich," she concluded.

Something was missing in Privalov's confession. Nadine felt it, but hesitated to ask bluntly. An admission of

his stunted, secret love for her was on the tip of Privalov's tongue, but he suppressed it.

"Ah, here's Maxim," Nadine said, nodding at the window.

Loskutov was walking along the board walk. Privalov did not recognize him at first, though his appearance had changed little. There was some profound spiritual transformation in his distinctive, unique frame, in the absent-minded expression of his face, and particularly in his eyes, which had lost their magnetic power. Nor did Loskutov recognize Privalov, and scrutinized him for some minutes before he said:

"Yes, yes, of course, now I remember—Privalov, Sergei Alexandrovich."

"This one also has a screw missing," Privalov thought, recalling the late Lyakhovsky's words.

Their conversation, the conversation of strangers, was somewhat forced. It was particularly hard on Nadine to witness it. She loved one, and pitied the other. The thought that but recently these two men were full of life and vigour brought tears to her eyes.

When Privalov was making his farewells, Loskutov stretched his hand out mechanically, then leaned back in his chair, as though trying to remember something.

"I'm expecting you," Nadine said, seeing Privalov out. "There are many things we must discuss, eh? Did you see poor Maxim's condition? It's a nervous break-down, and sometimes I simply don't recognize him—he's a changed man."

"How long is it since this began?"

"Mid-winter. First he complained of headaches, then of weakness, apathy and hallucinations. The doctor is treating him with electricity. Well, I hope you won't forget about us, and call."

## XIV

The case of actress Kolpakova's murder was to come up in the Uzel district court during the summer session. In the spring, with Victor Bakharev released on bail and staying with his father, Nicolas Veryovkin, who was to be his lawyer, visited the Bakharev home almost daily. He had an icy reception there at first. Old Luka burred at him like an old tom-cat. Vasily Bakharev regarded him with a trace of suspicion and faint irony; only Marya received "Victor's defender" with an open heart and went out of her way to treat him with her best preserves. Within a month Veryovkin practically became one of the family, and old Luka was the first to thaw. Nicolas never crossed the Bakharev hallway without a pungent flash of wit. His banter was always seasoned with a coin of the realm, and it is generally a fact that man's heart is not stone.

On closer consideration old Bakharev soon took stock of Nicolas Veryovkin's big heart. He grew accustomed to him. Furthermore, Veryovkin knew the Privalov trusteeship affair in all detail, and the old man discussed the Shatrov Mills with him to his heart's desire. Vasily Bakharev did not make new acquaintances easily. He was prejudiced against the Veryovkins, whom he thought to be absurd specimens of retrograde gentry. But young Veryovkin, he convinced himself, was a fine chap whichever way one looked at him. He was compliant and generous, always ready to oblige. Nor did he do it to ingratiate himself with a wealthy muzhik, like the others. No, it was simply part of his nature. One day, to repay Veryovkin for a favour, old Bakharev invited him to dinner. Marya Bakhareva rose up in arms against this display of intimacy. She said she would not come to table herself, and would not let Vera come.

"Too many stories are told about him," she declared, defending her hearth against a stranger's invasion. "He's said to be a drunkard, a gambler and an extortionist. He's defending Victor, and I'm doing everything to humour him. But not this—not inviting him to dinner and that kind of thing."

"It's hard to say what a man is like these days, especially by what people tell about him," her husband argued. "As for me, he looks a good man to me. Yes. And he won't do us any harm."

"He may not be what people say he is," Marya agreed. "Somehow, he strikes me that way too."

"There you are; we're just old fogeys, you and I," Bakharev said sadly. "Nicolas *will* come to dinner."

For Marya Bakhareva dinners and suppers were always something very important. A hodge-podge of superstitions and signs was associated in her mind with a laid dinner table. Vera shared her mother's beliefs and was alarmed at the thought of sitting at one table with Veryovkin, that "madcap friend of Victor's." Luka and Dosifeya also looked forward to the auspicious meal with misgivings. But, as often happens, the dinner passed in the most ordinary fashion. Veryovkin conversed stolidly with Vasily Bakharev, and generally behaved with great tact. He won Marya's heart with his appreciation of Dosifeya's culinary art. She was flattered by, and even admired, the way Nicolas regaled on her sister's masterpieces with an enviable appetite. As for Vera, who flushed like a poppy, Veryovkin did not even glance at her more than was absolutely necessary.

Late in winter old Bakharev left for his gold-mines, leaving a depressing void in the Bakharev home—what with Nadine and Konstantin gone. Victor Bakharev shrank into his shell. The atmosphere was oppressively joyless. Victor's case was to come up soon, and from time to time Veryovkin brought witnesses to the house,

and kept questioning young Bakharev. One day, as Veryovkin was preparing to leave, Victor stopped him.

"Don't hurry away like this. Let's go to Mother's. She's simply longing to play cards with you. They're playing preference just now—with Vera. Let's go."

Veryovkin was somewhat embarrassed, but since Victor's mother wanted it, he said, he had nothing against a game of preference.

"She's asked several times to bring you," Victor lied, eager to cause a little domestic fuss.

Veryovkin's sudden appearance in the lady's inner chambers indeed created a panic. Marya, who turned pale from fear, pulled Vera to her side, like a hen who shields her chick from the evil intents of a hawk. As for Pavla Kolpakova, the cards kept falling out of her hands—a most ominous sign among card-players.

"Here, Mother, I've brought Nicolas, as you've asked," Victor Bakharev said on entering her parlour. "He plays excellently."

The old women hesitated for a bit, then returned to the game. Victor also tried to play a hand, but was soon ingloriously banished for his horrid habit of stealing the tricks. Within half an hour the game rose to fever pitch. Veryovkin charmed the old women with his banter to the extent that even the staid Marya was scarcely able to contain herself when Nicolas so much as opened his mouth. The interesting game attracted an audience in the corridor. Luka, Dosifeya and Vera took turns at the key-hole.

"Funny, eh?" Luka marvelled, striking his sides. "He's won the old women lock, stock and barrel, the rogue!"

The game lasted about three hours. Marya was startled out of her wits when she looked up at the clock.

"We'll finish some other time," she said, rising from the table.

She caught herself instantly, but the silly word was out.

"Pfui, the reprobate!" Marya scowled after Veryovkin left.

"Why on earth did I say it? 'Some other time,' indeed!"

"But, really, he's nice," Pavla Kolpakova said good-naturedly.

"A regular comedian," Vera put in.

"Keep your nose out of this!" Marya cut in sternly. "A girl has no business discussing men. They're all alike."

But the affair served to give Veryovkin access to Marya Bakhareva's parlour, where they all frequently held cheerful preference evenings—a source of great pleasure to the old women. He had a way of dropping in casually and always knew the right time to leave. If he failed to turn up three days running, the old women began to pine, and even quarrelled over their cards.

Victor Bakharev's trial, scheduled for May, was approaching. Veryovkin did all he could for the boy. On the day of the hearing, as he was taking Victor to the dock, Marya burst into bitter tears and crossed her prodigal son. She even blessed the lawyer.

"The Lord is merciful," Veryovkin consoled the crying old woman.

Marya only waved her arm. Dosifeya stood in the street crossing the departing carriage over and over again, while Luka made off to attend the trial in person.

The courtroom was crowded with a select public, always thirsty for sensational, spicy cases. The Uzel *beau monde* and merchantdom held their breath when Victor Bakharev stepped into the dock. The witnesses were men of his own circle. Among them were the Privalov brothers, who again attracted general attention. Veryovkin wondered with a quaking heart who the jury

would be, fearing it would consist of clerks and employees. They would be merciless. A jury of merchants or muzhiks was a horse of a different colour; particularly the latter.

In anticipation of the defender's performance the public paid little heed to the witnesses and to the trite speech of the prosecutor. Nor did Veryovkin betray their expectations. He made a brilliant speech, in which he overrode the main contentions of the prosecution with unfailing wit, took the witnesses to pieces and boldly sketched a spiritual portrait of his client. The boy had a high-strung, sensitive, impulsive, highly gifted, but unpolished disposition. Trustful and artless, brimming with youth's ardour, he was taken in by a seasoned courtesan, Katya Kolpakova, who had several lovers. What happened then had to happen. The trusting enamoured youth was revolted by this picture of shameless vice. In a minute of extreme agitation, unconscious of what he was doing, he fired the fatal shot. Veryovkin described the various phases of the love affair with remarkable genius, and each step of the way made use of the available testimony to reveal the features of the people involved in the drama.

"The defendant is not an unblemished, ideal character," he declared. "Not at all. He is an ordinary mortal with a mortal's natural failings. But he was dragged into a disreputable affair—more like a game of cat and mouse. If another woman had been in Kolpakova's place, Bakharev would not have been in the prisoner's dock to-day!" This fact, Nicolas stressed, should be uppermost in the jury's minds when they decided on the verdict. The law punishes evil intent and incorrigible crime, while this was nothing but an accident liable to befall anyone.

The speech made a strong impression. The defendant's parting remark, in which he made an open-hearted confession, decided his fate: the jury handed down a verdict of not guilty.



While the public loudly congratulated Victor Bakharev and Nicolas Veryovkin, Privalov took the latter aside and said:

"Why did you sully Katya Kolpakova's memory?"

"I had no choice. She's gone—I had to pull Victor out of the hole," Veryovkin replied good-naturedly, adding sheepishly, "I'll tell you my secret. I was not doing it so much for Victor as for myself."

"What do you mean?"

"A yearning for a home and hearth," Nicolas explained.

"What on earth are you saying?"

"I've proposed. To Vera Bakhareva. Talked things over with her mother. The old lady promised—on condition that I get Victor off. Now I've just got to cope with the old man. I'm fed up being unattached. It's high time for the halter. Absolutely. Still, I'm a bit scared of old Bakharev. He may give me the boot."

Privalov wished his former solicitor and Vera every happiness. Their budding young love echoed painfully in his heart.

## XV

Loskutov was not getting better. It was rather the contrary. His mines were to resume operations with the approach of spring, but there was no question of his going there. Veryovkin found a suitable lessee, who took the mines over for a year. The Loskutovs, meanwhile, remained in Uzel.

"Maxim wants quiet. His pastimes must be simple and rural," the doctor told Nadine. "Rest, nourishing food, walking and a certain amount of physical exercise—that's what he needs. With plenty of fresh air thrown in, and suitable company."

"Where should we go?"

"I've considered it, and think Garchiki, the flour mill, would be best. Privalov has a fine little cottage there, where you'd be comfortable all summer. If you like, I'll speak to Privalov."

"I'd rather think it over first," Nadine said.

She had long wanted to leave Uzel, associated as it was with so many unhappy recollections. But when the doctor mentioned Privalov's flour mill she hesitated for some reason, although certain that Privalov would gladly give her the use of his cottage. She simply did not like the idea of going to Garchiki—a feeling she could not account for. Privalov called on the Loskutovs frequently, maintained a stolid silence if other people were present, and poured his heart out when alone with Nadine. Nadine explained this by the abnormal life he led, spending most nights as of old at the club in questionable company, even coming to her house on several occasions under the obvious influence of liquor. The latter circumstance greatly distressed her, and one day she told him gravely:

"Is it really so hard to give up drink? Couldn't you do without it, as you did before?"

Privalov looked at her squarely, and said after a pause:

"What for? It's one of the few pleasures I have left. It helps me to forget."

"But what if I were to ask you, Sergei Alexandrovich? If you won't give it up for your own sake, do it for mine."

"Do you really mean it?"

"I do."

"Very well. But mind you, when I'm sober I'm bad company. I shan't speak with an open heart then. Yet that is my only hope just now. I often reproach myself for saying too much, but my heart is so heavy."

Nadine pitied Privalov, but had no idea how to help

him. She often thought of the strange, inexplicable man and arrived at most controversial conclusions. One thing was clear—in spite of all his failings and errors, he was honest and forthright. His frank confession, strangely enough, did not disgust her. On the contrary, it convinced her that he was the victim of his own, of the Privalov, fortune—of the millions which had attracted such suspicious characters as Lyakhovsky, Polovodov, Veryovkin and the others. That he married Zosya was also plain; as plain, indeed, as the fact that Zosya had married him. What Nadine could not make out was Privalov's entanglement with Antonida Polovodova, that empty-headed society woman who was devoid of everything but beauty. She sensed a secret in this, something that had been left unsaid, something Privalov either did not care, or was unable, to explain.

Formerly Nadine had seen only the "suitor" in Privalov, and had disliked him for that reason. But now she was interested in him, in his spiritual life, even in his errors, which bore evidence of his highly original nature. He was the kind of man who could love and make life worth living. Nadine scarcely blamed Zosya, but would herself never have done to Privalov what Zosya had done. She pictured quite another Privalov—the good, fine Privalov that she would have liked to see. No wonder her father was so deeply attached to the Privalovs. Ever so often her thoughts so carried her away that she painted sweeping pictures in her mind's eye of Privalov's plans come true, and herself a helper and executor. She saw the Privalov flour mill in Garchiki, thousands of carts laden with wheat converging upon it from all sides, and a well-organized large-scale wheat trade, etc. It was the kind of life that afforded wholesome, industrious happiness.

Nadine had much free time in which to meditate. Her husband's illness had upset the little world to which she

had become accustomed at the mines. Now, living in town, she was at a loss what to do with herself. The doctor was busy all day with his patients, and she saw him only briefly. She had no other friends, and Privalov's visits served in some measure to light up her monotonous existence. Loskutov was as ill as ever, although the doctor failed to find anything definitely wrong.

"Things turn black in my head," Loskutov would tell his wife. "It's a harrowing experience. At other times everything becomes uncommonly bright. Numbers are at the root of it all—a certain mechanical rhythm, from which the rest of the world evolves like sounds evolve from air waves. I see it all very clearly, so clearly, in fact, that I could put it all down in terms of mathematical formulae or, better still, in terms of music. Seriously, the world is a harmonious entity with a numerical basis, and nothing conveys harmonious combinations as well as music. The wind's piping, the rattle of a passing carriage, the roar of machinery and footsteps—they can all be put to music!"

One night, Loskutov frightened Nadine out of her wits. He roused her and whispered softly:

"I've seen it all now."

"What?"

"All, absolutely all. It was a revelation. I saw it all clearly—all the things over which millions of men are puzzling their heads and which they will never understand. There are no moneybags, no paupers, no sick, no strong, no weak, no clever and no stupid, no evil and no kind. There's only happiness. And it's all so simple. It's a wonder the thing never occurred to anyone before—that is, it did, perhaps, but it withered and died. The outer world, you see, is moved by a single unconscious will expressed in rhythm and number. On the other hand, the boundless inner world is also built upon a harmonious essence, but it is very much more delicate, and

escapes the control of measure and number—it is the essence of spiritual substance. In their relations men represent constant dissonance, just as it exists in music. To eliminate dissonance we must create an absolute substance of the universal spirit, in which everybody would be appeased, being integrated in an infinite and multi-form harmonic combination arising out of itself and returning into itself.”

Loskutov developed the notion of a new, universal religion founded on his absolute spiritual substance, which would appease all nations and tribes. He did not see any practical obstacles to it. One needed only to go to Central Asia, that cradle of religious movements, and purify oneself from all carnal desires in long-drawn ordeals. It would then be easy to rise to the contemplation of the absolute idea which, he insisted, ruled our spiritual world.

Nadine listened with terror to this maniacal raving and had the feeling that she herself was on the brink of insanity. Her husband's hallucinations were contagious. They were the first step to madness. She wondered how to treat her husband's mirages, which were becoming more and more frequent. When she told the doctor about them, he shook his head and mumbled:

“Bad, bad, very bad.”

“What to do, doctor?”

“We must wait,” he replied, “until the ailment is more pronounced.”

Privalov kept his word and gave up drink, but was so pensive and sad that Nadine's heart bled when she looked at him. He scarcely ever spoke when he was sober; that is, he never spoke about himself and was, it seemed, ashamed of what he had told her previously. She now had two patients, and this made her own predicament almost unbearable. One day she tried suggesting a vigorous step to Privalov:

"I can see, Sergei Alexandrovich, that it's hard for you to change your ways, though you are trying to keep your promise. Don't take offence if I propose a compromise—drink here. I shan't let you drink more than is good for you."

"No, never. I've broken the habit, and if I happen to be poor company, the cause is quite different. Just chase me out when you can't stand me any longer."

Nadine rued her thoughtless suggestion, which had apparently offended Privalov. In the past he never took offence, although she had said far more offensive things. On the other hand, Nadine was displeased with him. She had merely wished him good, and he had no business taking it amiss. She was not his nursemaid after all. But this was just a momentary flash of anger, which subsided just as quickly as it arose. Again she pitied Privalov, who had confided in her so devoutly.

This is just why Nadine had not given the doctor an immediate reply when he proposed the trip to Garchiki. Something had held her in check, a fear perhaps of the prospect of intimacy with Privalov there, at the mill, where, in effect, he spent less time than in Uzel. But the doctor insisted, and Nadine was finally able to define what it was that embarrassed her.

"What will Zosya say when she learns we have gone to Sergei Alexandrovich?" she said candidly to the doctor.

"I've thought about it, Nadine. Zosya has forfeited her right to say anything. You probably know the state of her family affairs. For my part, I'm surprised that she is staying on in Uzel to this day. She would have done better by going away."

In the end Nadine agreed to go to the flour mill, because she could find no good reason to refuse.

The removal to Garchiki was a matter of a few days. Spring was in the air. Snow lay only in the ravines,

while in the fields the winter crop was already turning green. Garchiki and its environs, the proximity of the Uzlovka River and, last but not least, the flour mill and the three-windowed cottage, all pleased Nadine from the first. Loskutov also took nicely to the new surroundings and seemed to come to life again. He wandered about the fields and meadows from sunrise to dusk, and spent endless hours at the flour mill in engrossed contemplation of its hustle and bustle. The hallucinations seemed to loosen their grip on his disordered brain, and he looked visibly sounder.

The little cottage soon settled down to a peaceful existence, in which Nagibin and Father Savyol took a most active part. Their presence took the edge off the drab monotony of village life. Father Savyol struck up an intimate friendship with Loskutov, while Nagibin was closer to Nadine. The kind old man went out of his way to please the "lady," and looked after her with touching solicitude.

"We only miss Sergei Alexandrovich," Nagibin would say, sighing deeply. "The turn-out would then be complete."

"He can't come," Nadine would tell him. "He's a witness in my brother's trial, you know."

"Quite right. I almost forgot."

Until now we have said nothing about the little creature whose life had as yet scarcely outgrown purely vegetative processes—the little year-old girl, Manya, of whom Privalov had learned from Danila at the Irbit Fair. Occupied with her ailing husband, Nadine saw little of her daughter when they were in Uzel, where the infant was in the care of a nurse. But now Nadine devoted most of her time to the child. Nagibin was also deeply attached to it and showed an almost maternal care for it. It was a comic sight to see him cradling little Manya in his arms, taking her to the

bank of the Laletinka and amusing her by rolling about in the grass, imitating bird calls, or singing church hymns.

"She's the very image of her grandmother," he would say, staring at the baby. "Just as stubborn."

The girl was, indeed, too serious for her age. She was beginning to toddle about on her plump pink little legs and drew a tear from Nagibin's eye when, with a sunny smile, she said her first *dedu* to him, meaning grandfather. Her carefree laughter rang out clear as a bell in the cottage, and the wrecks of diverse toys *dedu* had brought her from town lay abandoned in all nooks and corners. The little being injected warmth and light into the measured days of the small cottage.

Privalov arrived in Garchiki after Victor Bakharev's trial, and together with the news of Victor's acquittal brought word of Nicolas Veryovkin's intended marriage. For the time being he only told Nadine of Veryovkin's engagement, and it was she who told Nagibin about it.

"May the Lord bless it!" the old man sighed fervently. "Couldn't be better. Nicolas has a heart of gold if he's held in check. But Vera's going to have it hard with him at first, I'll say."

A small family party was arranged to mark the auspicious occasion, and there was no end to the discussion that arose. The village air seemed to do Privalov a world of good. He was like a new man. Nadine was surprised to see him animated and joyful. In the evening, when making his farewells, Nagibin kissed Nadine's hand and uttered in a choking voice:

"We couldn't have done without you."

"Oh, you don't mean that," Nadine laid a hand on Nagibin's arm, "what have I to do with it?"



"That is our affair. We know what we know. Allow me to kiss your hand again, miss," Nagibin replied.

"I'm no miss. I'm a mother!"

"For each his own, and for us, miss, you're a miss. That's just what I say in my prayers: 'Lord be merciful to our miss.' I give you my word. Allow me your hand, miss!"

Spring in the countryside with its thousand cares opened Nadine's eyes to a life she had not known before. Her notions of the countryside, picked up from books, bore little resemblance to reality. Nadine was particularly interested in the manners and customs of peasant family life. She was deeply shocked by the shackled lot of the peasant woman. The muzhik worked hard, but not nearly as hard as the woman. She took twice as much punishment. This distinctly female world was brimming distinctly female interests and scourges, which were without number and measure. One discovery succeeded another in Nadine's mind, as though she had come to some previously unknown realm. What were all our fancied, make-believe cares alongside the harrowing purgatory of the peasant woman, whom even God had forsaken? Nadine soon got to know many of the local women. In her cottage she always had a crowd of ancient females, for whom she had a soft spot. They were true heroes of labour, the most unrelenting, unsung kind of labour. They brought endless tales of the hell on earth that had fallen to their lot, with their thousand and one ailments, woes and inconsolable grievances, all of which had just one remedy—the grave.

"Our dear, dear," one hunched old woman told Nadine, "stay with us and see with your own eyes. The muzhik—all he knows is the field and horse. It's the woman who does the housework, the work in the field

at harvest-time, like a convict, and has endless worries about the children."

Nadine was invited to a village wedding, and fell ill after the peasant "merriment." No wonder the wedding songs were funereal—an outlet for the boundless wretchedness of womankind. All that had previously bothered Nadine now paled, faded into the background. She now saw her sacred duty—the duty of every enlightened Russian woman—in helping her sisters, forsaken by God, by history and by their people. Here in Garchiki, as nowhere else, did she feel the great power of knowledge. The most infinitesimal grain of it bore fruit a hundredfold. Even Nadine's distinctly "urban" knowledge found fertile soil, and yet she still had to learn thousands of things she had never thought of before, such as medicine.

Not a week passed since Nadine had come to the countryside, but she discovered that she lacked time for even the most urgent things, to say nothing of things she thought desirable. She had to be in several places at once, as they say, to manage everything—visit a woman heavy with child and several ailing women, and keep an eye on a bunch of homeless children. What was more, soon up to a dozen golden-haired boys and girls regularly appeared at Nadine's each morning to "learn letters."

"Our women are giving you no end of trouble, miss," Nagibin would say to her. "Give them rope, and they won't leave you time to die—women are women.... And the old hags keep coming day in and day out."

"It shouldn't worry you," Nadine replied testily, "let them come. I'm always glad to have them."

Nadine's attitude towards Privalov seemed to have changed. It often appeared to him that she avoided him. There was no longer any question of their for-

mer candid conversations. In Privalov's presence Nadine treated her husband with a display of love, as though she meant to indicate that he, Privalov, was not wanted. Even Loskutov noticed the change in her, and told her of it with his usual frankness.

"You are mistaken, Maxim." Nadine flushed. "I just haven't any time for his troubles, I have enough of my own."

"Well, I just thought I'd tell you," Loskutov said, surprised by his wife's strange annoyance.

On one or two occasions, however, Nadine told Privalov that she would have been completely happy if she could have stayed in Garchiki for good. She would found a school, and a homeside hospital. But, she added sadly, as soon as Maxim was well they would have to leave for the mines.

## XVI

Polovodov was to make his first report on the Shatrov Mills in autumn, at the close of the industrial year. Privalov and Veryovkin waited for the day impatiently, because it would give them a pretext to remove Polovodov from his post. Two of the heirs were on hand now, and this gave them grounds for hope.

In the old Privalov mansion life ran its usual course, with the sole exception that Tit Privalov's presence lent it a Bohemian flavour. The two brothers living under a single roof were now far more apart than before, when Tit Privalov was an entirely unknown quantity. Each day brought new evidence of the insuperable rift between them. The senior Privalov was convinced that his younger brother was hopelessly lost, what with his physical aversion to work and his morbid thirst for pleasure and entertainment. He was a Bohemian, a Gypsy—restless, troublesome, and yet decid-

edly apathetic. Once the novelty of his new circumstances palled on him he plunged into the same whirlpool that had almost sucked in the elder Privalov. In the company of Lepyoshkin and Ivan Veryovkin, Tit rapidly acquired extravagant habits and signed promissory notes left and right, which Sergei Privalov was obliged to honour.

"Do what you like, I can no longer pay for your follies," Sergei finally said to his brother.

"I'll go over to Polovodov's side in that case," Tit threatened.

"You'll only dig your own grave that way. As for me, I don't care. Do what you like."

But Tit knew that it was to his own advantage to side with his brother, and did not carry out his threat.

Finally the time came for Polovodov to turn in his report to the Court of Wards in Mokhov, three hundred versts from Uzel. Veryovkin hastened there and employed all possible means to get a copy of it.

"Congratulations! Polovodov is in for it!" he sang out on returning from Mokhov. "He's overdone it. Haha-ha! Just read his report--it's a joke. We'll tie the worthy into knots. Just imagine! Under Konstantin Bakharev the Shatrov Mills yielded an annual profit of four hundred thousand, and what would you think the profit was, in Polovodov's report? *Seventy thousand*. But that's not all; out of these twenty thousand fall to the sale of metal left over after Bakharev and fifteen thousand to the Zemstvo taxes which Polovodov has not even bothered to pay. That leaves a mere thirty-five thousand. As solicitor for the Creditors' Council he was entitled to five per cent of the profit, which makes three and a half thousand in cash. But he took ten thousand!"

Privalov did not trust his ears and read the copy of the report himself. It was true. He could only marvel

at the reckless way in which Polovodov plunged his finger into the pudding. Polovodov's days were unquestionably numbered. All he, Privalov, had to do was to take advantage of the circumstances.

"Now you must go to Mokhov yourself," Veryovkin said to him. "We'll twist them into knots. Who do you think sits on the Court of Wards—it's a regular Offenbach operetta! The chairman is Feonov, a retired official, the biggest pettifogger the world has seen; the two members are even worse. One is a 78-year-old medico, and the other an embezzler who served a three-year sentence. A pretty collection! What's more, the chairman gets thirty rubles a month, and the members get twenty-eight. Polovodov must have had an easy time bribing them, having bagged more than three hundred thousand in a single year! I've seen cases and cases, but never anything like this."

"What surprises me," Privalov said, "is Polovodov's haste. He could have appropriated much more over several years."

"Everyone has his own ways. He probably thought this way better, or, maybe, he just couldn't contain himself. The enemy is strong and moves mountains."

"Where is Polovodov just now?"

"Here—in Uzel. I have that on very good authority. As a matter of fact, I saw him myself as he was leaving Khiona's."

Privalov knew what took Polovodov to the Zaplatins, but no longer cared. He scarcely ever saw his wife, and had neither love nor hate for her any more.

He quickly arranged his affairs in Uzel and left with Veryovkin for Mokhov. There he applied directly to the governor, who took a most active interest in the crying outrage. Veryovkin drew up a report for the governor and made unstinting use of his eloquence to describe Polovodov's feats. The governor, an old-time official,

took things in hand, and owing to his effort the Court of Wards decreed to deprive Polovodov of his post as solicitor of the Creditors' Council.

"We'll take Polovodov to court for fraud," Veryovkin schemed, rubbing his hands. "And we'll demand the money he stole through a civil court. We'll checkmate the bird."

After Privalov's return to Uzel, just as he was leaving for Garchiki for a few days, Veryovkin learned that Polovodov was reinstated as solicitor of the Creditors' Council by a reversed order of the Court of Wards.

"We'll have to make another trip to Mokhov," Veryovkin said.

Privalov thought twice before he agreed to make the 600 versts there and back along the bad autumn roads. But the matter could not wait. Veryovkin was straining at the leash, eager to grapple with Polovodov. This time the governor's reception was much cooler. Some artful designing hand had "turned the tables." Veryovkin made a super-human effort to convince the governor to intervene a second time and protect the interests of the heirs. A fortnight of hardships at various offices and departments finally decided the issue and Polovodov was replaced by some unknown mining engineer.

"Another merry-go-round like that and we'll be dizzy," Veryovkin observed.

Privalov returned to Uzel on a wet, pitch-black autumn night. No sooner had he washed than the doctor walked into his study, pale and distressed. The midnight visit surprised and frightened Privalov. The doctor anticipated his question by handing him a note written hastily on pink letter-paper.

"Here, read this," he said in a choking voice.

Privalov recognized Zosya's handwriting.

"My dear, dear doctor, I shall be far away when you read this letter. You are the only one I have ever loved. That is why I am writing to you. There is no one else in Uzel whom I shall miss, just as there is scarcely anyone else who will cry over me. You will ask what drove me from Uzel. It was boredom, boredom, boredom. Address your letters *poste restante*, Vienna, before Christmas, and to Paris after Christmas. For the last time I shake your honest hand.

"Your worthless pupil,

"Zosya.

"P. S. My husband is not likely to be distressed by my departure, because he has evidently found his happiness *en trois*. If you should see Khiona Zaplatina, tell her from me that she will have to look herself for the gold-mines which Polovodov promised her. As for me, I am leaving Shaitan, my shaggy friend, to her as a personal souvenir."

A tense, oppressive silence hung in the air for a few minutes.

"I hadn't expected this of Zosya," Privalov said finally.

There was no answer. The old man, silver-haired and shrunk overnight, stood by the window sobbing his heart out.

"Doctor," Privalov called to him quietly.

"What is it?" the doctor said, covering his tear-stained face with his hands.

"Did—did she go—alone?"

"No—with Polovodov."

Another pause followed. Privalov did not pity himself, but was deeply sorry for this fine old man weeping like a child at his side.

"Did you love her very much, doctor?" Privalov asked.

"I? Oh, yes. Zosya meant more than life to me. I love the girl in her until she was twelve, and the woman after that. Oh, if I could only have her back—she'll go under, she'll go under."

Privalov listened to the doctor's passionate confession with only half an ear. He thought: "I never loved my wife. Here is the man who would really have given her everything a man can give."

The doctor was in hysterics and Privalov had to ten him until the morning. The old man grew calmer shortly before the grey autumn dawn, but even this overdue calm was interrupted by an uproar in the hall. It was Khiona who, it seemed, was one of the last to learn about Zosya's disappearance. She rushed resolutely into the study with a distorted, angry face, and stopped in the middle of the room, studying the doctor and Privalov.

"May I know where Zosya has gone?" she uttered finally, turning to Privalov.

"Yes, of course. She's on her way to Vienna."

"Impossible! You're lying," Khiona shouted. "Who did she go with?"

"You ought to know better."

"What are you insinuating, Sergei Alexandrovich? I'm just a poor, helpless woman. It's easy to throw mud at me. You know me very well, you know my weakness."

To put an end to the disgusting scene Privalov handed her Zosya's letter.

"So that's it!" she stammered, trying in vain to recover her poise. "The mines . . . Shaitan."

Next minute she rushed out of Privalov's study and regained her senses in the street amidst the bleak cold September morning. A searing wind blew in her face, and the oozy mud squelched knee-deep underfoot. "She will have to look herself for the gold-mines. . . . I am leaving



her. Shaitan, my shaggy friend." The phrase had stung Khiona like a snake. Was this gratitude for all the trouble she had taken, for the risk, for her loyalty? People could not be trusted. She had been discarded like an old rag. Yes! Khiona's sallow face was terrifying. Her hair hung in strands from under her hat, her coat was unbuttoned. She looked back at the Privalov mansion with a wild cackle, shook her withered bony fist at it and spat on the ground. Then she staggered to a passing cab and said hollowly:

"To the Veryovkins."

When Nicolas learned of Zosya's and Polovodov's flight, he cursed aloud.

"There," he said, "is the reason why Polovodov couldn't wait to make his haul. He had no choice. He'll give us a fine chase all over Europe with his neat three hundred thousand.

## XVII

Privalov decided to go to Petersburg and put the matter before the Senate. He could now turn Polovodov's embezzlement to his own advantage. Furthermore, this time he was fighting the case not for himself alone, but for his brother Tit as well, which made it stronger. Veryovkin was to accompany him and only asked to postpone their departure until old Bakharev returned from the gold-mines, so that his own fate would be decided one way or another. Privalov, who had some business to arrange in connection with his flour mill, agreed to wait until the first snow.

Veryovkin came daily to the Bakharevs. His visits infused life into the cloistered sectarian household. Even Marya became milder and more talkative. As for Vera, that clever girl made no show of ecstasy and treated her husband-to-be as intelligent patients treat a tried-and-

true medicine. At times she made fun subtly of the somewhat simple Nicolas, who showed signs of confusion and always sighed comically.

"Our Vera is nothing like her father," Luka mused. "There's mischief in her. She'll be like her dear mother when she gets to be a woman. She's twisting her suitor round her little finger. He seems to have the gift of gab for everybody else, but when the miss makes fun of him he does no more than sigh."

Marya Bakhareva did not regret her choice for Vera and hoped that the old man would fall in with it. Sometimes, looking at Veryovkin, she would say:

"It's a fact, Nicolas, one never can tell where one loses, and where one finds. See what came out of Victor's shooting match! Wait till Father comes—he'll make the fur fly."

At long last old Bakharev returned. Vera herself told him of the choice she had made. The sudden news agitated the old man; he could not hold back his tears.

"Do you like him?" he asked Vera.

"Very much, Father."

"Good for you. In my day the old people made the choice for their children, but it's different now. You ought to know whom you like best. I just want you to be sure."

"I am, Father. He's so kind."

"Grant God, grant God, my dear. But I'll speak to him myself."

The old man spoke his mind to Veryovkin in no uncertain terms.

"You're a good chap yourself," he said, "but that father of yours. . . ."

"But, sir, it isn't fair to blame a man for his parents," Nicolas retorted.

"True, quite true. But blood and breeding tell, you know. Can't get around it. I must admit, though, that at times the offspring is nothing like his father or mother.

I'll just say this: I won't let you have Vera until you give up that dog's business of yours."

"But it's my bread and butter."

"You'll give it up. Furthermore, you'll get nothing by way of dowry," the old man said, ignoring Veryovkin.

"Ready cash never does well. Earn your own."

"I wasn't expecting any ready cash," Nicolas protested.

"Well, whether you were or not I just wanted to let you know. It's good to be a lawyer, of course. It's an easy life. But people are spoiled by an easy life."

"Let me think it over."

"There's nothing to think about. You're lucky. Born with a silver spoon in your mouth. But I shan't give you any money; I'll teach you my business. That'll be enough. Earn your own fortune."

Veryovkin turned it over in his mind for several days, and decided to take up gold-mining.

"Just let me finish the Shatrov Mills case," he said to Bakharev. "I'll have to make another trip to Petersburg."

"I'm not holding you. But it's no use, mark my words. You'll not get back the mills, that's certain. Well, what about Privalov?"

Veryovkin told the old man everything he knew about the flour mill and the wheat trade. The latter heard him out and mused long over his words.

"What strange men, the Privalovs!" he said finally. "To look at them you can twist rope from them, but when their mind's made up they go through with it, and the devil take the hindmost. They say he drank a lot last winter, eh?"

"He doesn't any more."

"Good. At least his wife had the good sense to leave him, or she'd have done him in. There's blood and breeding for you, Nicolas. But I must say, it isn't easy to go through life with beauty such as hers. He bit off more than

he could chew. There's more sin in beauty than in money. Men of my age go mad over it, and the young—the young are cut out for it. Pity! What is he now: neither bachelor nor widower—and not a married man.”

Vera's wedding was to be after Christmas, after Vevyovkin's return from Petersburg.

All this time Privalov stayed in Garchiki, which became the scene of tragedy. Loskutov lost his mind. The doctor came down from Uzel, but the patient was beyond all medical help. He was at death's door. He suffered from an acute form of insanity attended by fits of religious mania. He thought himself the messiah, come to save the world and die a second time to redeem mankind. His transports alternated with fits of black despair which culminated in frightful frenzy. The patient raved and ranted and had to be tied, lest he break his head or kill the first man who came to hand.

Privalov, Nagibin and the doctor took turns at his bedside. As for Nadine, the doctor insisted that she should remove to the village, where she would be out of ear-shot.

“You may care little for yourself, but you must think of your daughter,” the doctor said when Nadine refused to follow his advice. “You are of no use to the patient, and will do yourself untold harm. Be sensible.”

At last Nadine agreed with the blank indifference of people who have lost all hope. She did not cry or complain, and her mute grief greatly troubled the doctor.

The acute stage of Loskutov's ailment lasted ten days, in which he did not sleep a wink. Then he suddenly grew quiet.

“The paralysis has begun,” the doctor warned Privalov. “It'll be all over soon.”

“Have you warned Nadine?”

“Yes. Death is the happiest possible ending for him.”

In two weeks Loskutov was no more. He was buried in the village cemetery, which Nadine daily visited. The doctor always accompanied her, troubled by the restrained, mute grief of his former pupil. He was in low spirits and even regretted that Zosya was still living, living and sliding lower and lower down her slippery path. He had been fond of Loskutov, had admired the intelligent, gifted young man, who, like so many other gifted Russians, had died in vain.

To distract Nadine, the doctor made plans for her future, but she insisted on staying for good in Garchiki, where she had buried her love.

"I'll start a school and do some doctoring among the sick," she said. "I must keep myself busy. That's my best medicine."

The day came for Privalov to leave for Petersburg. In parting he said timidly to Nadine:

"I have a big favour to ask of you. I'm going to be away long, possibly a whole year. If you'd agree to help Nagibin run the flour mill, it would be a load off my mind. I must have someone here whom I can trust and depend on."

Nadine would not hear of it at first, but when Nagibin tearfully pleaded with her she gave in, and wrote to old Pavla Kolpakova to come and keep her company, at least for a time.

## XVIII

A year passed.

Veryovkin's wedding was in January, and in the spring he went with Vasily Bakharev to the gold-mines. Privalov and his brother Tit stayed in Petersburg, where the litigation continued. The summer passed, winter came again, and the world was buried in deep snow.

Veryovkin and his wife Vera stayed at the Bakharevs'. Nicolas seemed to have given up his old ways and

friends. Gold-mining was after his own heart, and his father-in-law thought highly of him as a helper. The ex-lawyer had many merits as a family man, and had taken well to the quiet stay-at-home life. His relations, whom Bakharev could not stomach, were at first a cause of certain discord. Even Vera, who got along well with anything and anybody, was uneasy in the presence of Ivan or Agrippina Veryovkin. It must be said in all justice, however, that the afore-mentioned Ivan did not trouble them with his presence too much, being deeply absorbed in his personal affairs. In the past year he had swept the board again, and then had lost everything to the last kopek.

One November day Vasily Bakharev was busy in his study when Nicolas walked in and coughed indecisively. He had just come home and brought a fresh jet of cold winter air into the room.

"What's new, Nicolas?" the old man asked, laying aside a stack of invoices.

"Privalov's back."

"Did you see him?"

"Yes."

His son-in-law's curt reply made the old man sit up. He felt there was something in the air, but hesitated to ask what news Privalov had brought with him from the capital.

"The Shatrov Mills have been sold," Veryovkin said, wishing to be done with the whole thing.

"Sold? To whom? Why?"

"The ministry thought it best to sell them to cover the debt to the treasury," Nicolas explained.

"Who was the buyer?"

"A company."

Bakharev covered his face with his hands and sat still for some minutes. Nicolas heard him sobbing, try-

ing desperately to stifle the tears that were choking him.

"What of the heirs?" the old man asked.

"The mills were sold at the price of the debt to the treasury, and the heirs are to get forty thousand in damages."

"It's settled then, eh?"

"Yes. The company will pay for the mills in thirty-seven annual instalments, which means that it got them for next to nothing. It seems to me that the whole company is a front for a group of government officials."

Old Bakharev said, "They all got a slice of the pudding—all, except the heirs. The Privalov fortune has gone up in smoke! I've seen all kinds of dirt in my life-time but nothing like this. What about Privalov?"

"Oh, nothing. He's going to his flour mill. Here is another bit of news. I've seen the doctor. He's going to Paris. Had a telegram from Zosya the other day; she informed him that Polovodov shot himself. The police were on his tail all over Europe, but he kept slipping through their fingers. In Paris they finally tracked him down. Well, as they were coming in to arrest him, he shot himself. Now Zosya wants the doctor to come to Paris. She wants Privalov to give her a divorce."

Bakharev made the sign of the cross, and whispered:

"She'll untie our hands."

Late in the evening, when Veryovkin was about to go to bed, Luka hobbled in and said:

"The master is asking for you."

"Very well. I'll come, you old fogey. Tell the master that the master will come if the mistress will let him."

Luka only waved his arm: "What kind of a man is this Nicolas, who never says anything plainly!"

"You and I are going at daybreak tomorrow," Vasily Bakharev announced when Veryovkin entered his study.

"Very well."

Veryovkin sensed by his father-in-law's voice that it was no use asking where and why they were going. The old man had something on his mind. All right. If they had to go, they'd go. Why not? The road was good this time of the year. The old man's sleigh was a dream. He would sleep all the way.

It was still dark the next morning when a dashing fleet-footed troika stood ready in the Bakharev courtyard. It was bitterly cold and the trees were white with hoar-frost. A pleasant tingle courses through the veins when one leaves the warm house and steps into the open on a morning like this. The snow crunches under the runners, and endless white fields flash by. The stars twinkle faintly in the sky, and the bell rings merrily under the shaft-bow. There is poetry in a winter sleigh ride. Then come roadside inns full of coachmen, hot cabbage soup, a glass of vodka—and again the twinkling stars, the road again, the jingling of the bell, and the pleasant dreamy sensation that one never has in trains and steamers.

Nicolas was in a poetic mood travelling he knew not where with Vasily Bakharev. The old man brooded in his corner of the carriage, sucking a cigar. Just once he said:

"D'you happen to know how long Privalov will stay in Uzel?"

"About three days, I think," Nicolas replied.

The roadside inns, or stations, as they were known in those parts, flashed by. After a steaming dinner at one of them Veryovkin fell soundly asleep under the bear-skin blanket. It was night when he awoke. The *kibitka* was descending at a spanking pace to some vil-



lage. Dogs barked, and a string of carts loaded with flour passed by them in the opposite direction. Then came the village, buried in snowdrifts, dim lights twinkling in the little snow-powdered windows, and smoke rising here and there stiffly into the air from the chimneys. The women had already made their fires. A tireless rooster, that village sentinel who told the time, was crowing somewhere near.

The carriage stopped before a five-window hut which, at first glance, seemed to be blazing inside, the fire in the well-to-do house being so large. The master of the house came out to see why his dogs were kicking up a row.

"Are you Dorofei, the village elder?" old Bakharev asked.

"Yes, Your Honour."

"Well then, open the gates. Where's Nagibin?"

"He's at the mill," said the elder.

"Send for him."

Nicolas had no idea where they were, but entered the warm hut with a thrill of anticipation for the pleasure of sleeping his fill in the over-heated chamber. A healthy man sleeps beautifully when he comes out of the cold, particularly after a trip of some hundred and fifty versts. While the bags were being brought in and the housewife, fussing at the stove, made the samovar, Veryovkin inspected the new hut, and wondered where on earth they could be. It was only when Nagibin entered the room that he finally guessed that they had come to Garchiki.

"Aha, so that's it!" he thought to himself, greeting his old acquaintance.

"Well, we've come for some of your flour," old Bakharev chuckled, slapping Nagibin's back. "We've run out of it and want more. My son-in-law is a past master at eating, you know."

They chatted about all sorts of things over their tea. Vasily Bakharev spoke about the sale of the Shatrov Mills, and Nagibin shook his head and sighed. It was getting lighter outside.

"I'll turn in, gentlemen," Veryovkin said, wanting to leave the old men to themselves; he had long since been fighting a losing battle against sleep. His head felt like a dead weight.

"Is *she* here?" Bakharev asked quietly when Veryovkin's snores resounded in the room.

"Yes."

"Well, how is she? Tell me."

"She's just the same. Started a school this winter, fusses about with the children, and doctors the women. She's busy with the flour mill. That's an excellent idea you had—of coming here. Excellent."

Bakharev told Nagibin of Polovodov's suicide and Zosya's wish to divorce Privalov.

"I came—to see Nadine," Bakharev said, lowering his head. "I couldn't stand it any longer. And I was afraid to travel alone—might give up the ghost any minute. I'm old. Well, do you still think what you wrote me?"

"Yes, I do. She's pining away before our very eyes. This is no life for her. She's like a house without a roof."

"Can I go to see her?"

"You can. She's an early riser. But I'll go first and see. She might get a scare."

"Perhaps we'd better send Nicolas. He's good at talking to females," Bakharev suggested.

"No, let me do it. I'll be back in a jiffy, and we'll go there together. It's rather awkward."

Old Bakharev was on pins and needles waiting for Nagibin to return. He had not seen his daughter for

three years. He had learned from one of Nagibin's letters, however, that he now had a granddaughter, and that Loskutov had died. He had hoped then that Nadine would come back home, or would at least visit them. But she had not come. He made cautious inquiries through Nagibin whether there was some new reason for her strange behaviour; the old man was afraid that the first Loskutov would be followed by a second. In such matters he had little faith in people, and particularly in women. But he learned from Nagibin that there was nothing of the kind and that Nadine lived like a "nun" in Garchiki—teaching children, fussing with the peasant women, and helping out at the flour mill. She was eating out her heart—couldn't even be approached at times—but was young and her grief would wear off. Sergei Alexandrovich, too, was despondent, poor man, and the heart bled to look at him. Nagibin had hesitated to share his notions with old Bakharev about Nadine and Privalov, whom destiny had brought together, as it were, in Garchiki, but one time he did write that Nadine "had great power over Privalov and, one might say, had saved him from drink and cards." That was something Privalov had himself confessed to Nagibin. It was all these circumstances that made Vasily Bakharev decide to go to Garchiki.

"She's up. Let's go," Nagibin said, reappearing in the doorway. "I told her I would bring a dear, dear visitor, a visitor she didn't even dare hope for. At first she wouldn't believe me, and then seemed to take fright."

The old man chattered irrepressibly all the way from the elder's house to the mill cottage, and in his excitement kept taking off and putting on his fur cap. Bakharev's heart sank when he finally saw the roof that sheltered his Nadine. He was panting, and felt his knees shaking.

"This way," Nagibin was saying as he opened the wicket leading to the cottage yard.

They passed through a hall into a large room with tables in the middle and saw Nadine, all in black, stern and pale. She recognized her father and ran to embrace him with a joyous cry. It was a happy moment for all present. Nagibin wept noiselessly in the hall, praying under his breath and hastily wiping the tears off his cheeks with a cotton handkerchief.

"I've come—myself," Bakharev breathed, scrutinizing his Nadine. "Getting old. Wanted to see you."

Nadine took her father to the other half of the cottage, where she had two little rooms—one for herself and Manya, and the other for Pavla Kolpakova. Old Pavla recognized Vasily Bakharev's voice and fled through a back door to be out of the way during these first happy minutes of reunion.

"I don't have a parlour, Father," Nadine was saying as she picked up the toys scattered about the room.

The old man looked askance at the corner, where there stood a small baby bed; he winced at the sight of it, and Nadine noticed how he turned away. Tiny Manya was sound asleep, little aware what anguish she caused her grandfather.

"Well, how are you?" Vasily Bakharev uttered after a short but profound pause. "Still absorbed in your school and the sick women? I've heard all about it. A little birdie told me. You look as though you've just left the nunnery. It's been three long years, hasn't it?"

There were tears in the old man's voice, but this time he succeeded in holding them back. Nadine, deeply agitated, did not know what to do or say. It had been so long since she had seen her father, whom she had always adored. In her eyes he was a paragon of virtue—kind, generous and strong. She had forgotten

how he had treated her and saw in him what she wanted to see. His large silver head, his open vigorous face and stern kind eyes—they were dear to her in this distinguished-looking man, and she kept kissing and cuddling up to him. She had lost her head from sudden joy and little remembered what she was saying, repeating the same questions and answering irrelevantly. Her joy, her tears, her grief all mingled and gave her an inexpressible magnetism in her father's eyes. The girl had become a woman. But what a woman! In his daughter the old man loved himself, loved those spiritual qualities which he respected most—frankness, honesty and that striking sincerity given to but a few.

The austere environment, bordering on poverty, made a strong impression on Vasily Bakharev and told him what he so often failed to understand in his daughter. Now, as never before, he was certain that Nadine would never return under his parental roof, but would live on in this little world of her own making.

"I shouldn't have come if I had known that you would visit Mother and me," he said. "But I thought it over and saw that you had no time for us—we have our own lives, and you have yours. That is why I shan't ask you to return, Nadine. Stay here if the Lord wills it, as long as you are well."

"Yes, Father, I'm quite happy here. I want nothing more."

When the first transports of joy subsided, Nadine experienced an unpleasant doubt. She sensed that her father had not yet told her the cause of his visit and was concealing something from her. It was written in his face, despite his efforts to hide it.

Their conversation woke up little Manya. The girl looked with her sleep-laden dark little eyes at the old man, and smiled blissfully.

"Manya, *dedu* has come," Nadine said, taking the girl in her arms. "Our real, real *dedu*."

The girl looked fixedly at the grey-haired old man and replied curtly, hands clasped tightly round her mother's neck:

"No."

"What a pretty little girl," Vasily Bakharev said, stretching his hand out to her. "Well, Manya, let's be friends."

"No."

The girl hugged her mother closely and flatly refused to go to the silver-haired, real *dedu*; several times she looked into her mother's eyes, as though suspecting treachery.

Pavla Kolpakova's appearance with the samovar put an end to the depressing scene. Little Manya threw a gay smile at the old woman.

"I've come to join your nunnery," Vasily Bakharev said jokingly to Pavla. "There's somebody with me, but he's asleep. I'll bring him here as soon as he gets up."

After tea Nagibin took Vasily Bakharev to look over the flour mill and the latter was highly pleased with what he saw. When he returned to the cottage, Veryovkin was already there. He was standing on all fours, pretending to be a bear, and little Manya screamed and laughed heartily. The funny uncle captured her heart right away, and she allowed him trustfully to hold her in his arms.

Vasily Bakharev spent a full three days at the mill. He told Nadine in great detail about his gold-mines and his new prospecting. His affairs were in fine shape and the future promised million-ruble profits. Nadine, in her turn, told him about her own frugal life. It seemed there was no end to all the things Father and daughter wanted to tell one another. The three years

that had separated them served to bring them closer together than ever.

"Well, I'm going home tomorrow," old Bakharev said in the evening of the third day, when they were in the room alone.

Nadine sensed that her father would now speak about the real reason of his visit, which she so terribly feared. She even paled.

"I must have a heart-to-heart talk with you," the old man said, putting his arm round her shoulder. "Let's talk like old friends. I have done you wrong, but I know you'll let sleeping dogs lie. I've suffered too much all these years for you to hold anything against me. I'm old, Nadine, old enough to think of dying. Any day now it'll all be over and I'll have to answer before God for all my earthly deeds and designs. So I've been thinking—I'll die, and you'll be left alone with a small girl on your hands. You'll always make a living, of course, but what kind of a life will it be? Solitude awaits you—total solitude. Yet you're young, life is long, your past grief will wear off. Think of yourself, my dear. You're no girl any longer. Every time I think about you my heart bleeds. It's hard for me to die, Nadine, knowing that I'm leaving you behind like a sleeve without a coat, as the old people say."

The old man took a deep breath. It was hard for him to continue and he raised his hands nervously to his head.

"I'll be frank with you, Nadine. Forgive me for sticking my nose into your affairs. But you're my own flesh and blood, and no one but your father will trouble himself about you. You have a daughter of your own, and you know you'd do anything to see her happy."

"That's true, Father. But I should never make her do anything she wouldn't want to do."

"Right, Nadine—only as far as words go. What if a certain thought keeps nagging at you, nagging all the

time? I don't want to make you do anything against your will, but I'll tell you my most cherished wish—my idea, the idea which I shall take to my grave. There is someone who loves you, has loved you long, and you would be happy with him, and you'd make him happy. You'd make everybody happy—him, and us, and all the people for whom you now work. You have ignored him, but we knew, and still know, how much he loves you. Of course, we're all mortals, and all have our failings...."

"Father, you forget that I am in mourning," Nadine interrupted him.

"What of it, my child? I might die any day, and you'll be in mourning for me, but what would that mean? We'll all die, but as long as we live we must think of the living. You know who I mean, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, let's be serious. You're a big girl and ought to know that there is more grief than joy in life if one thinks only about oneself. Isn't that so? Now you want to live for others, and for your little girl. Right? Fine. And if you yourself should also be happy—would they lose, those people to whom you want to dedicate your life? Well, tell me honestly, would they? They would not. They stand to gain by it. The old women say two tapers burn brighter than one. We cannot revive the dead, and must think of the living. Your own personal happiness will give birth to the happiness of, perhaps, hundreds and thousands of other people. That is worth thinking about. That is our first, our Christian duty. You'll never be a girl again, but you will be a fine wife. You may be surprised, perhaps even shocked, by my frankness, but see it through my eyes, my child, put yourself in my place; here I am, an old man with one foot in the grave, having lived my time like all the others, through thick and thin, and holding a huge fortune in



my hands. What am I to do? I'll never have a second life and all my money will return unto dust whoever gets it—Konstantin, Victor, Veryovkin, or my wife, Marya. If I were to give it to you, you'd refuse to take it. I know. Meanwhile, I have a debt I must pay, Nadine. Old Pavel Gulyayev took me in as an orphan, and your mother as well. We were raised under the old man's wing. All we have is from him. I was at his death-bed, and his last wish was for me to look after his daughter, Varvara, and his grandson. I did all I could. You know it. Now it only remains to leave my money to Sergei Privalov so he can buy back the Shatrov Mills. They would never have been sold if I had been well and hadn't had that trouble with my gold-mines. Well, frankly speaking, I love and respect Sergei, but cannot trust everything to him. He has many failings, although I know he would have been quite a different man if he was in good hands. You know it too, and have probably thought about it."

The old man embraced his daughter and whispered thickly:

"If I should ever have a grandson who was a Privalov, I should leave everything I have, everything I shall ever have, all to him—him alone. Let him grow up and buy back the Shatrov Mills, and I'll die contented. My child, Sergei is the last of the Privalovs!"

Nadine wept quietly, and the old man kissed her lovingly.

"I'm not saying it must be now—tomorrow," he whispered, "but I'll always say that Privalov loved you in the past and loves you now. Perhaps it was due to you that he made all his silly mistakes. It's hard to love a second time, but perhaps you'll grow accustomed to him, and will respect him. My dear child, don't say anything now. Tell me you'll think it over. If you like, I'll ask you on my knees."

"Father, dear, dear Father, I don't know, I don't know," Nadine moaned. "Let me think it over. I'm so unhappy. Have pity."

Three years passed. On bright sunny days an old, grey-haired man would walk limping along Uzel's Nagornaya Street with a five-year-old dark-eyed little girl. It was Vasily Bakharev. His doctor had advised him to promenade daily from his own house to the Privalov mansion and back. He no longer went to the mines, where Veryovkin handled all affairs. One autumn day, when it was warm and fine, the old man led a grey-eyed boy of some eighteen months out of the Privalov mansion. The boy was his grandson—Pavel Privalov.

The hard-headed old man's idea had won out: the Privalov fortune may have gone up in smoke, but he had not allowed the Privalovs to die with it.



Д. Н. МАМИН-СИБИРЯК  
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